ISSUE 64

THE FUN MAGAZINE

ISSUE #64:
THE LEGACY OF THE
NINTENDO 64

THE SUPER MARIO BROS. MOVIE

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: TEARS OF THE KINGDOM

NINTENDO 64 ON NINTENDO SWITCH ONLINE EVERY GAME REVIEWED!

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METROID 64

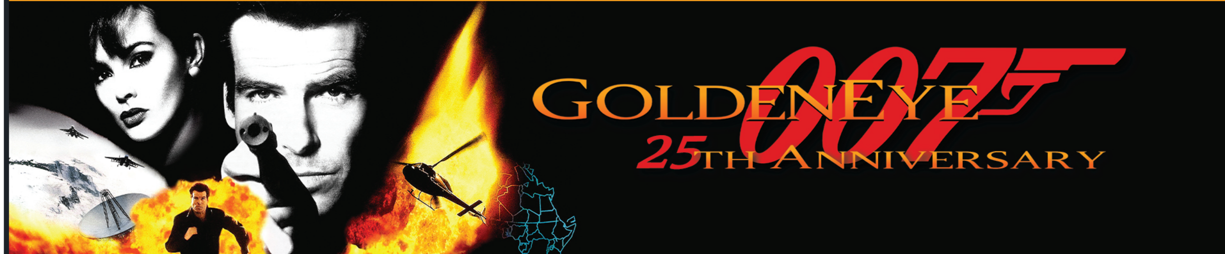
HADES II

MARIO KART 64 HD

INTERVIEW: STEPHEN FROST OF DIGITAL ECLIPSE

SUPER KIWI 64

MARCH/ APRIL 2023



. . . AND IN WITH THE NEW

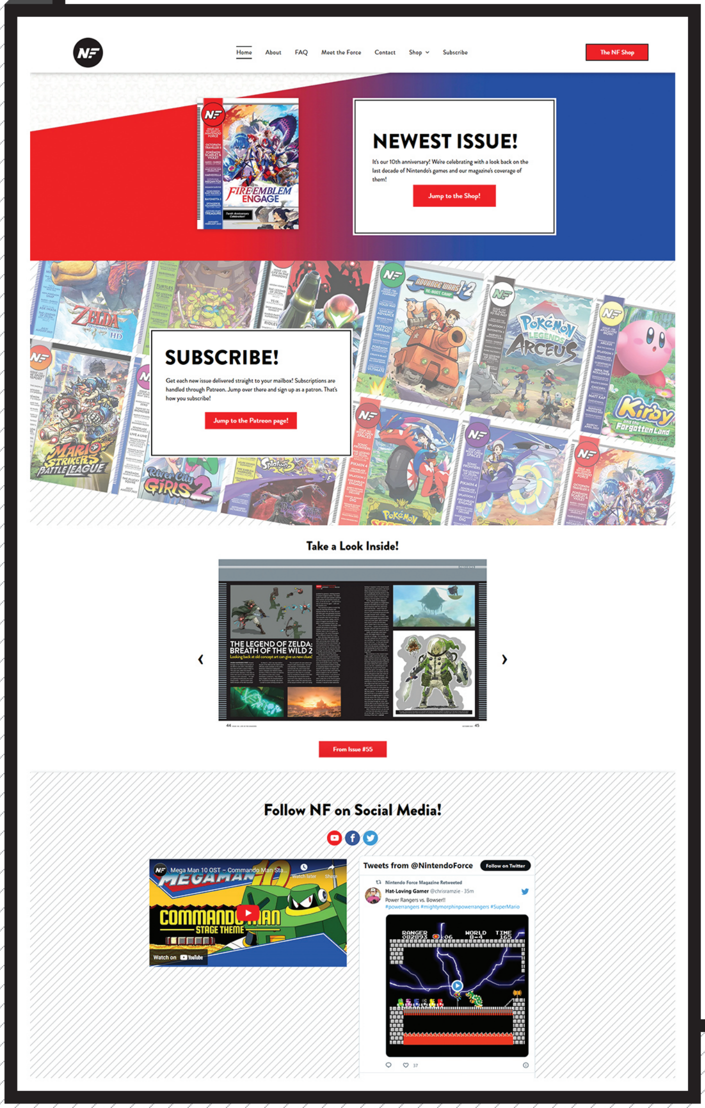
WELL, IT TOOK a little longer than I would have liked, but the official Nintendo Force Magazine website has finally completed its long-awaited (and long-needed) design refresh. It's live right now!

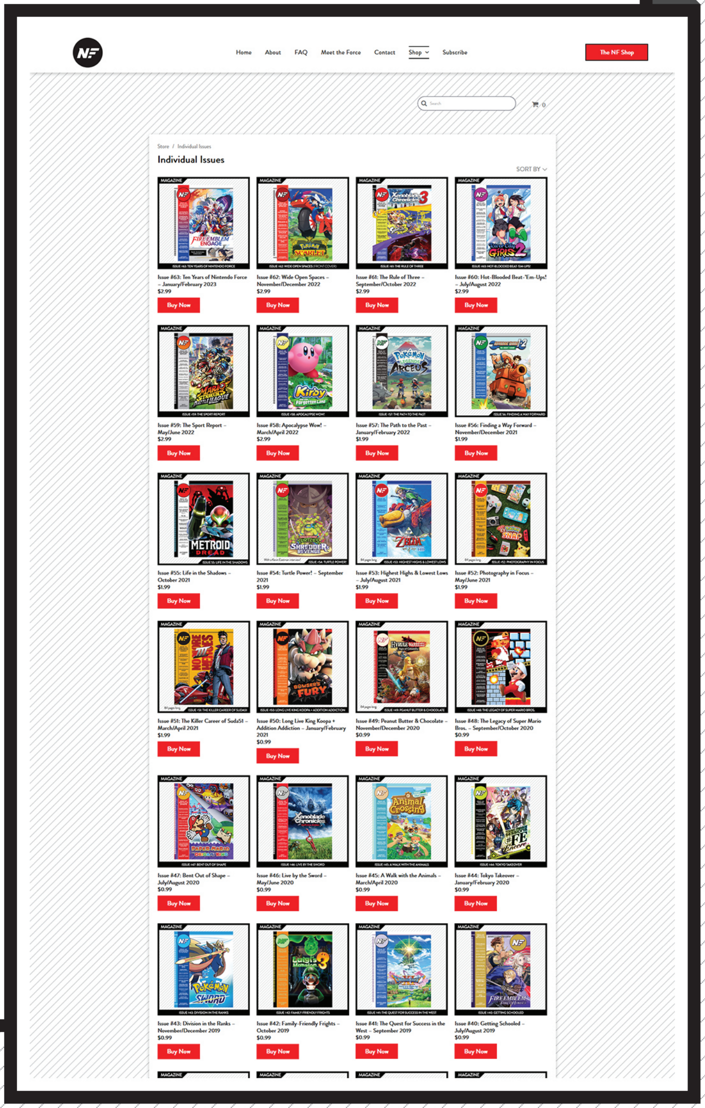
The primary function of the website is handling sales of our back issues – sold both individually or in occasional bundles – and the revamped NF Shop will still serve that purpose. But there's been another change in addition to the spruced-up look! Now any time you (or a friend, or anyone!) buys a Print copy of a past issue, you'll get a link to download the Digital version of that same issue for free. Previously that was offered as a "Combo" purchase, but now Digital is an instant freebie when you buy Print! (Though you can still choose to buy Digital by itself.)

The secondary function of the site is to introduce newcomers to Nintendo Force! New page design previews and magazine section introductions do a better job of giving prospective new readers a glimpse inside our issues – so if you've got friends or family members who still aren't aware of NF, have them browse the new site, won't you?

Note that subscriptions are still handled separately at **Patreon.com/NintendoForce**. No change there! **– LUCAS**

NFMagazine.com or NintendoForceMagazine.com





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THE LEGACY OF THE
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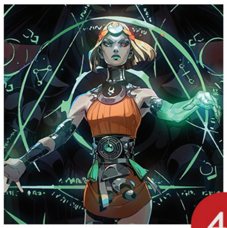
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ON THE COVER

Welcome to The Fun Magazine! We've given our front cover a one-time makeover in honor of the Nintendo 64, because this is our 64th issue! (You could probably tell that from the gigantic "ISSUE 64" text up at the top.) The main piece of artwork featuring Mario in absolute awe of the Nintendo 64 hardware was originally made to promote the product at Nintendo's 1995 Shoshinkai event in Japan. Here in 2023, it works well to capture every N64 fan's marvelous memories of time spent playing The Fun Machine!

INBOX

FUN TO THE 64TH POWER

Being a fan of video games used to be a numbers game.

In the late '80s and into the mid-'90s, gamers were unhealthily obsessed with "bits." If your preferred video game system had more bits than your friends' machines did, then you were the winner! You could hold your head high and strut victoriously all around the playground at recess time.

See, the NES was just an 8-bit system. But then Sega raced ahead and brought their Genesis, a *16-bit* system, to the market faster than Nintendo could respond! Even the unsung TurboGrafx-16 was able to claim bit superiority over the Big N before the 16-bit Super NES finally arrived and leveled the playing field. But then Nintendo got outclassed again when the 32-bit Sega Saturn made its debut!

There could only be one response. Only one mathematical move would be bold enough for Nintendo to reclaim the playground crown. It was time for . . . Nintendo 64!

This NF issue, our 64th ever, is dedicated to that great moment in time and the unique console library that was created in the N64 era. We've got a roundtable discussion about the legacy of the system, as well as reviews of every Nintendo 64 title that's made it way to Nintendo Switch Online as of this writing. We've got a 25th anniversary retrospective on GoldenEye 007 (one of the greatest N64 games) and then more N64-inspired articles and comics beyond that!

Hopefully NF #64 will be a time-warping trip back to the '90s for many of you, while younger gamers get some insight into a hardware era of days gone by!

(How many bits do you think the Switch has? Hmm . . .)

LUCAS M. THOMAS, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

ISSUE #63: JANUARY/ FEBRUARY 2023

Our celebration was a great success! NF turned 10 years old and we marked the milestone with a look back at all of our first decade's issues, as well as shone a spotlight on the brand-new Fire Emblem Engage. Our coverage of that title continues with our review in this issue, so flip ahead to Page 68 to see that! Then head right back here for our regularly scheduled Inbox content: Player's Poll responses!

Our latest Poll asked you all to tell us which character and/or voice actor in the new Super Mario Bros. movie you think will steal the show with the best/funniest performance. Question #2 asked if you've ever seen the live-action Mario movie from 1993, and if so, what your current thoughts about it are. Finally, we wanted you to gaze into your crystal ball and foresee the future of Nintendo movies: Which Big N brands will get films after Mario's?

LETTERS

#1) I think Mario/Chris Pratt is going to be mostly in the spotlight. (Since he's Mario!)

#2) No. I've wanted to watch it but I keep forgetting to ask.

#3) I think that a Luigi's Mansion movie is a great thing to consider. I've beaten all three Luigi's Mansion games so I have quite a lot of ideas on how it would go. If that doesn't count (because it's a spin-off of Mario), I would pick a Legend of Zelda movie. **— IAN ROSS**

I think Keegan-Michael Key as Toad is sure to steal the show. He's a very animated and funny actor to begin with, and he's proven himself in other animated features already. It's a no-brainer that he'll crush it in the Mario movie.

I saw the '93 Mario film when I was a kid. I don't think I saw it in theaters, but I'm sure I rented it on VHS shortly after it was available. I thought it was pretty cool back then, and I haven't seen it since. I will continue to avoid rewatching it as an adult to keep my rose-colored glasses untainted! Hopefully the new Mario movie won't suffer the same derision, and my kids can enjoy it throughout their lives.

There are some obvious choices in the Nintendo library to get the big-screen treatment: The Legend of Zelda, Kirby, Metroid, etc. I think it'd be cool to get a movie for a lesser-loved Nintendo property, though. Give me Must Love Nintendogs as a sequel to the Diane Lane/John Cusack rom-com! **— KURT PRENGER**

The strategic non-rewatch. Respect.

Happy Birthday, Nintendo Force! I joined the Force a few years ago, and it's been a great experience following along.

I think that Peach and her voice actor will really make the movie a big hit. We've (at least me) have always seen the Mario Brothers as some goofy plumbers who get transported into this strange world, filled with Goombas and Koopas and all the like. Based on the trailers, Peach seems to make the world more . . . in-depth. But, at the same time, she adds her own personality to the movie.

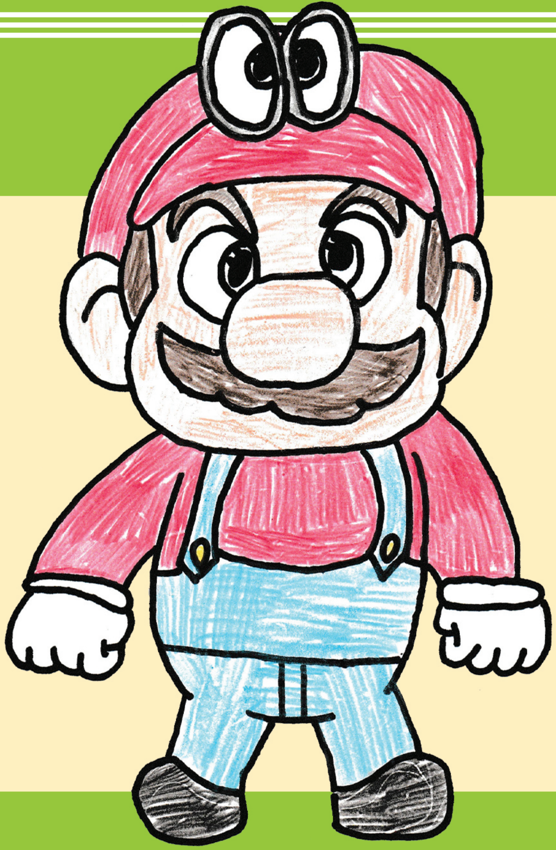
I have not seen the 1993 Mario Bros. movie. In fact, I've never even heard of it – but now I want to watch it!

I agree. If this movie does well, (which I'm assuming it will) Nintendo should really consider making more movies. Pokémon has already got their spotlight, with countless TV shows and movies on Netflix. We've had a Legend of Zelda show. But I've recently gotten into the Splatoon manga, being a big fan of that series, so maybe a movie there would be cool – but it's probably not going to happen. If that doesn't work out, I think maybe a Metroid movie would be cool, based on Metroid's newest game, Metroid Dread, with the E.M.M.I.s and all that.

It's been a great few years, and I hope to make more memories with Nintendo Force. Until the next issue! **— LOGAN MOODY**

Jack Black as Bowser will be a treat, just to hear him sing again. **— ZEEBOR**

Will we get a crooning King Koopa!?



A SUPERBLY DRAWN SUPER MARIO!

My 9-year-old son Rowan R. wanted to enter your Poll. He also wanted to share this drawing he made, as he is excited for the new Mario movie. I think he followed a video tutorial on YouTube to make it. He also plays a lot of Mario Odyssey, lol. Here are his answers for the Poll:

1. Peach, because in the trailer she looks tough and ready for battle.
2. I have not seen it, but I have seen the show, so I bet it would be good.
3. Super Smash Bros. Ultimate, because it would be so cool to have every fighter battle and the winner could be the best smasher! **— TOM**

Thanks for sending in this excellent drawing of Mario, Rowan! Video tutorials on YouTube are a great resource. We didn't have those back when I was a kid! I had to teach myself how to draw Mario by tracing him when he was in Nintendo Power!

Bowser is going to steal the show because he's BOWSER! And he's the only one with a voice that suits him!

I have never watched the 1993 movie, but I am going to at some point.

I think Kirby should get a movie! It could be like Sonic's movie where he makes friends with a human after he gets sent to the real world! **— SILAS H.**

I really have a good feeling about Keegan-Michael Key as Toad bringing home the mushroom by kicking off the movie with a morning ritual like Guy in Free Guy, and how he's also going to be vital to the story as he goes through, because I am now fully convinced that Chris Pratt is worthy of Mario, due to his "Wahoo!" on Rainbow Road from the new trailer.

I have never watched the O.G., but I have watched the Gaming Historian video and read the section in Console Wars about it.

And for the final question, I strongly believe that the Inklings should get a chance on the big screen. I mean, look at all the lore and unproven story behind Splatoon. It's too good to pass up! **— MILO**

Ever since playing it, EarthBound has always stood out in my mind as a great coming-of-age story. It portrays the beauty, confusion, horror and fun of growing up as well as any movie I have ever seen. I laughed, I cried. It was truly an unforgettable experience. I wish a movie was made from it so the story can be more accessible to everyone. **— MATT F.**

Thinking a bit outside of the box here, but a movie taking place on Wuhu Island would be really interesting. I recall Miyamoto having a lot of ideas for the locale, and a movie taking place on it would really expand its possibilities. Plus, Miis like Matt would probably feature, and I think everyone can agree that would be amazing to see. **— ZACHARY H.**

Mr. Miyamoto has been heavily involved with the Mario movie, so maybe he'll remember Wuhu!

I think there are lots of characters who could steal the show, but I don't think it will be Mario. My guess is that it will be Bowser (Jack Black), although it will most likely depend on people's personal preference. I think the dark horse would be Charles Martinet for whatever his voice is used for.

I remember watching the original Mario movie in theaters when I was a kid, and I enjoyed it. Looking back, the movie seems like it's a bootleg Mario movie rather than an official Nintendo movie.

The Legend of Zelda comes to my mind, but I don't think it would make a good movie. I feel it would have to be a multiple-part movie like the Lord of the Rings or Hobbit trilogies, so I think it would work better as a streaming service series. I think that Star Fox would be a great fit for becoming a movie. **— ERIC S.**

I think you're on target: Star Fox could be big!

Hi Mr. NF!

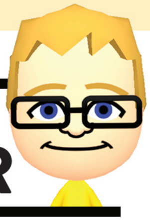
For Question #1: I won't go on about Chris Pratt voicing Mario, since you've probably heard enough hate about that, and it isn't really answering the question either. I also don't think Peach's voice suits her, but anyway. Luigi's is good, but I really think it'll be Jack Black who'll rock the show as Bowser! It's hard to do Bowser since he's almost never voiced speaking, but he sounded really good in the trailer! It's too bad Daisy probably won't be in this movie. Hopefully in a sequel!

For Question #2: Unfortunately I haven't seen the 1993 movie. Or should I say fortunately? I would like to watch it sometime, if only to make fun of it!

Question #3: I'd like to see a Legend of Zelda movie! My favourite timeline is the Hero of the Wild, so I'd like it to be about that one, but I'd watch any. They could even have a crossover between the different timelines, with all the Links at once!
— KYLA H.

I don't think anyone's ever called me Mr. NF before. I kinda dig it!

CARTER'S CORNER



Hello again!

The answer to the quiz from last time is . . . seven! That's how many Pokémon I've raised to Level 100 so far in Pokémon Violet. Here they are in order: Meowscarada, Dachsbun, Pawmot, Kingambit, Tinkaton, Cinderace (from a super-tough Tera Raid) and Chi-Yu. As of this writing it's February 10, so I might have even more when this issue gets to you! (I'm aiming for a Level 100 Miraidon next.)

Speaking of the super-tough Tera Raids, they are indeed super tough! Once you beat the Academy Ace Tournament (in the endgame) your teacher, Jacq, will call you, and he wants you to beat a lot of five-star Raids – around eight or so. Then he'll call you again and he tells you to stay away from some even tougher Raids, the six- and seven-star ones. I beat that seven-star Cinderace with a Slowbro my Dad's cousin traded me, but that was kind of cheating. I beat my first six-star Raid today! It was a Fairy-type Revavroom, and I beat it with my Tinkaton. Once you beat your first six-star raid, Jacq will call you and give you some LP.

Quiz time! This is Issue #64, so what is my favorite Nintendo 64 game? I'll tell you next time!

CROSSOVER OF THE REALITY ALL-STARS!

Most of the people reading this magazine know Jonathan Holmes as a writer and a Comic Break artist. Those who've delved a little deeper are surely familiar with his podcasting exploits. But did you know this renaissance man was a reality TV star before stepping into any of those other roles? Jonathan was a cast member on the fifth season of Road Rules, which was an MTV show that tossed a group of strangers together in an RV and sent them on a wild road trip adventure filled with crazy challenges to complete. His season was called Northern Trail, and since it originally aired in early 1998, it's celebrating its 25th anniversary right now. Happy anniversary, Holmes!

A perk of Jonathan being connected to the greater MTV/CBS reality show community is that he sometimes gets to meet up with stars from other shows! So pictured here is Jonathan meeting and snapping a selfie with the winner of Survivor's 32nd season, Michele Fitzgerald! She was kind enough to strike a pose with one of our issues, and she's recently talked about getting more into gaming . . . so she might be playing Switch right now!

THE PLAYER'S POLL

Congratulations to **Rowan R.**, the winner of our most recent Player's Poll! Your new chance to win is below, and this time around we're interested to read your responses to three questions inspired by the next Zelda adventure!

QUESTION #1

Hype check! Are you excited to play The Legend of Zelda: Tears of the Kingdom? Why or why not? Will you be there on Day 1, or hold off until later?

QUESTION #2

Link's getting some new methods of transportation soon. What's your favorite vehicle/mount/other way to get around in a game?

QUESTION #3

Place your final bet: What will Zelda's role be in Tears of the Kingdom? Playable character? Damsel in distress? Tag-team co-op partner? Let us know!

Send your responses to **PlayersPoll@NFMagazine.com** with the subject line "Player's Poll for Issue #65" – this time, one reader whose answers are picked for print will win The Legend of Zelda: Tears of the Kingdom! Good luck!

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Super Nintendo World is Open in America!

Head to Universal Studios Hollywood to begin your own real-life Nintendo adventure!

AT LONG LAST, the wait is over!

It's been nearly *eight years* since it was first announced, but finally, *finally,* Super Nintendo World has opened its doors in America.

The official grand opening day for Super Nintendo World's new location at Universal Studios Hollywood was February 17, 2023, which means if you're reading this issue, you could go there right now! You could! You could totally just drop everything and drive, fly (or walk?) to California to enter the Mushroom Kingdom yourself!

That Mario series stomping ground is the focus for this new theme park, as despite the name calling to mind a more general celebration of all things Nintendo, it's really just a Super Mario World at the moment. Other brands owned by the Big N might get introduced at some point in the future, but for starters they're sticking with the tried-and-true mustachioed man.

Iconic Mario series locales that have been recreated in the real world include Peach's Castle, Bowser's Castle and a towering mountain rendered in a style similar to the one seen in Super Mario 3D World from the Wii U – it's covered in colorful characters like Piranha Plants, stacks of Goombas and moving Thwomps (though guests don't have to worry about getting squashed!). Tucked in-between those imposing edifices are small Toad Houses housing businesses like the 1-UP Factory (a merchandise/souvenir shop) and the Toadstool Café (offering fine dining with Mario-inspired foodstuffs).

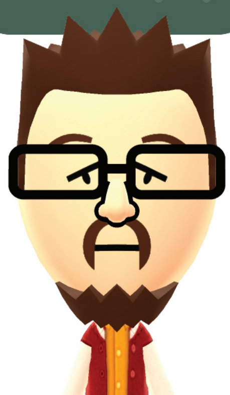
The park is also filled with secrets that guests can interact with by using wristworn Power-Up Bands. You might stumble across a hidden minigame, or a cache of coins! Costumed Mario, Luigi and Peach performers will pose for photo ops as well.

The biggest attraction, though, is the Mario Kart: Bowser's Challenge dark ride. Guests hop into supersized four-seater karts and wear a special pair of VR goggles in order to interact with the "race" as it happens in real time! Toss a Koopa shell! Collect some coins! Win the Golden Cup!

It's exciting that all of this is finally available to experience in America, since Japan's Super Nintendo World has been open there for two years now . . . *but* America hasn't caught up quite yet. The new Hollywood location is missing the Yoshi's Adventure ride! It isn't planned to come to California at all, unfortunately – but it will be a part of the Florida version of Super Nintendo World that's set to open in Summer 2025.

So now the choice is 1) go now to the Hollywood version for a lesser experience, or 2) wait two more years for the Florida park. Ack! – **LUCAS**

> "I'd love to jet off to Hollywood since I've been waiting for this for so long, but I don't think I can justify the trip when I could plan an Orlando vacation for 2025 instead and get to check out the Yoshi ride too. I guess I'll keep waiting. – **LUCAS**"



We Can Vouch for This

Save some cash by using Nintendo Switch Game Vouchers!

> I'm hopeful that we'll see a return of the Nintendo Selects brand of budget-priced retail versions for Switch games as the system nears the end of its life cycle, but in the absence of that, these Game Vouchers are a welcome option to have access to. – LUCAS

VOUCHERS ARE BACK!

They went away for a while (here in America, at least), but Nintendo has recently revealed that Switch Game Vouchers are available once more.

So . . . what are Nintendo Switch Game Vouchers? They're basically digital coupons used to save money on purchases of first-party games.

It works like this: You purchase two Game Vouchers for the combined price of $99.99. Then, once you own them, you can turn around and redeem them for just about any first-party game available from Nintendo. If you choose two games that are regularly priced at $59.99 apiece, then you're effectively saving yourself 20 bucks – you're scoring two $60 titles for an investment of only $100.

But there are a few caveats! First, you have to be an active subscriber to Nintendo Switch Online to be allowed to purchase the vouchers. Second, any vouchers you buy have to be used within one year after you buy them – they'll expire if not redeemed after 12 months. Lastly, they can only be exchanged for the digital versions of Nintendo's games. No physical copies!

Those are three significant hoops to have to jump through, but if you do happen to already be an NSO subscriber and you prefer to get your games digitally from the eShop any way, there's no reason to not take advantage of this offer and save yourself from having to pay full price.

You can even use the vouchers to pre-order upcoming games! As of this writing that means titles like Pikmin 4, Advance Wars 1+2: Re-Boot Camp, Bayonetta Origins: Cereza and the Lost Demon and even The Legend of Zelda: Tears of the Kingdom qualify.

And if you do cash in a voucher for Tears of the Kingdom? Well, you'll save a little more cash than normal! It's been revealed that its MSRP will be $69.99 rather than the usual $59.99, so if there's any other Nintendo title you've also had your eye on, buying a $99.99 pair of vouchers to use on both it and the new Zelda sequel makes the most mathematical sense. Your wallet will surely thank you for your thrifty spending! **– LUCAS**

The Big 3 Will Skip E3

Is the expo already dead in the water before opening its doors?

THREE ISSUES AGO I wrote in this same spot about the planned resurrection of the annual Electronics Entertainment Expo. Once a fixture of the entire video game industry's yearly rhythm, E3 served for decades as a central summertime space for game studios big and small to show up together and show off their latest projects in progress.

. . . So what's going to happen to the show now that the three biggest studios of all aren't planning to show up?

Just a handful of months in advance of E3 2023's scheduled opening date of June 13, all three major console manufacturers – Nintendo, Microsoft and Sony – have confirmed that they will each have no presence on the show floor. That is a shattering blow to the already fragile chance E3 had of ever returning to any fraction of its former prominence. Throughout the expo's prime years, those three companies commanded the majority of the square footage set aside for eye-catching exhibits, game demo kiosks and executive meeting rooms – having none of them take part will leave literal huge gaps in the floor plan in the storied halls of the Los Angeles Convention Center.

I've been vocally skeptical about E3 making a comeback, even while acknowledging that the event was a ton of fun in years past. The industry's just moved on! This dismissal might *finally* be the last nail in the expo's coffin. We'll soon see! **– LUCAS**

Super Mario Bros. Movie Merch!

Jakks Pacific has prepared a vast new lineup of toys to complement the film.

THANKS TO A bevy of broken street dates from Walmarts across America, the Internet got a good early look at the Super Mario Bros. Movie toy line from Jakks Pacific. Nobody should have been able to check them out until February 26 because they were locked in the system, so right about the time this mag is hitting mailboxes people may actually have this stuff! For now, though, all we have are pics.

The first set we saw was the action figures of Mario, Luigi, Peach and Toad. Five inches is the scale, but I don't think Toad or Mario quite reach that height, or maybe Peach and Luigi will exceed it? They each have multiple points of articulation and feature accessories, like Toad having a frying pan and Luigi being equipped with a flashlight. There's also a set of mini-figures that come with Question Blocks larger than the figures. These feature characters like Kamek and a Koopa Paratroopa, alongside the four aforementioned characters. These may work with the playsets that also leaked, like the brothers' yellow van that unfolds to reveal a Mushroom Kingdom scene, or Peach's Castle. There's also a fire-breathing Bowser figure that appears to be larger than all of the other items!

A whole other set of figures will be inspired by the Mario Kart portion of the movie, with each figure paired with a kart of various designs. For example, Koopa Troopa appears in a Torpedo Ted kart! Or maybe Bullet Bill? The photos are blurry!

Something else to mention in the cavalcade of goods is the Hot Wheels Movie Mario in a kart. That may be accompanied by a whole track to play on featuring locales from the movie.

We won't know the full extent of the toy line or what exactly each toy does until they officially release, but until then it's fun to get sneak peeks. Check your local Walmart!

Hot Ticket Items

Hades merch is scoring scorching sales!

FANGAMER HAS RELEASED some impressive loot from the smash indie hit Hades. Talking Skelly, Talking Dusa and Cerberus plushes all make for excellent chatty and cuddly collectibles. Several other characters appear in cartoon pin form, including Hades himself! They have several apparel options with art from the game as well. They even have a desk mat based on Hades' own desk, an official soundtrack and a development book with several dev stories and art pieces.

If you want less cute and more brooding, snag a pre-order at your favorite import shop for the new Pop-Up Parade figure of Zagreus. He's a non-poseable figure equipped with the Stygian Blade and a determined look, ready for his next escape attempt in the underworld. More Nendoroids are also still on the way for Megaera and Thanatos, and Zag's Nendo is getting a second run!

The World of Nintendo Expands

After years of making mostly Mario merch, Jakks is working with other Big N brands again!

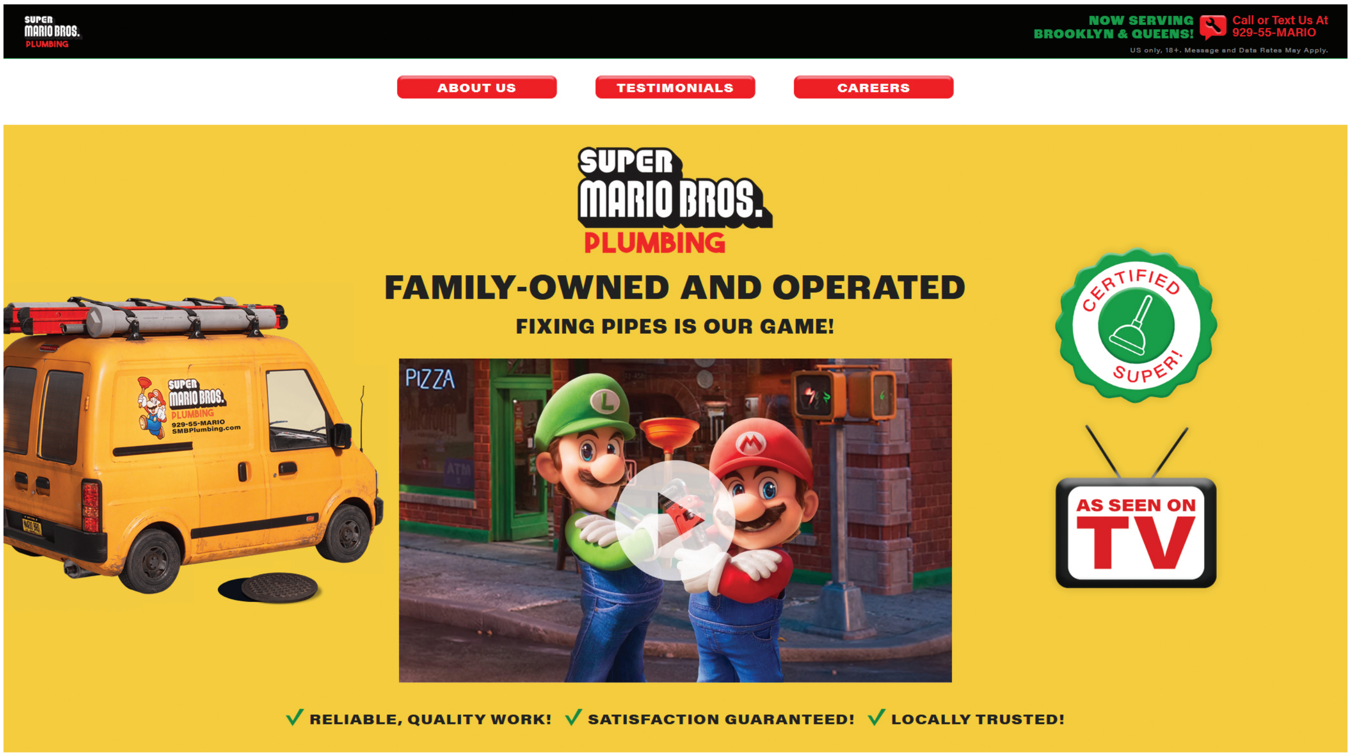
SUDDENLY REDISCOVERING THAT Nintendo has other properties than just Mario, Jakks Pacific has released new Zelda, Link and Samus figures. You may be saying that all of these characters have been released before – and you'd be right. In fact, the last Link figure featured Breath of the Wild gear and came out in 2021. However, these are all-new sculpts and stand slightly larger than previously released models. All have improved and more varied articulation and come with new items. Zelda has her garb from Breath of the Wild and comes with her Sheikah Slate. Link comes with a Soldier's Broadsword and Samus comes with . . . herself. As a Morph Ball. I hope that this small and unexpected release will kick off a trend of having more Nintendo properties in the toy aisle!

Reel in Your Very Own Smallfry!

Splatoon 3's little buddy is coming home thanks to, appropriately, Little Buddy.

GIVEN THE POPULARITY of Splatoon 3's Smallfry, it should come as no surprise that we would see a plush-ified version ready to be collected by Splatoon fans. There has already been a Smallfry plush release through Banpresto's Ichiban Kuji prize event, but that was limited, exclusive to Japan and much harder to obtain than San-ei's new retail release version will be. The plush will be part of Splatoon's All-Star plush collection that also features recent releases of Judd and Li'l Judd. Joining it will be a yellow Inkling and blue Octoling, and they will all release in late June. There are already plans to bring him to North American shores, too! Do you think we'll also get plushes of Shiver, Frye and Big Man? If past releases mean anything, I wouldn't be surprised. Stay fresh!

BY BRETT MARTIN



The Mario Brothers are in Business!

Super Mario Bros. Movie marketing, as presented by the Better Business Bureau?

GOT A PROBLEM with your pipes? Super Mario Bros. Plumbing is ready to lend a hand at warp (zone) speed!

We're fast approaching the official opening day for the brand-new Super Mario Bros. Movie, and we're got a full preview of the film prepared for your perusal up ahead on Page 36. But I wanted to give special attention to the way that Nintendo, Universal and Illumination have kicked off the marketing for the movie: by advertising the Mario brothers' plumbing business as if it were a real service available in New York City!

The centerpiece of this pre-release ad campaign is SMBPlumbing.com. If you point your favorite web browser in that direction, you'll land at the site shown above: an intentionally underwhelming website made to look like Mario and Luigi slapped it together themselves with some kind of free site-building software. (It even has fake broken images!) The site implores all people with plumbing problems to hire the brothers . . . but then highlights a trio of testimonials that slap low ratings on them and slam their professionalism. The one positive review seems to be written by their Mom? That's a whole rabbit hole of Mario series lore to go diving into right there!

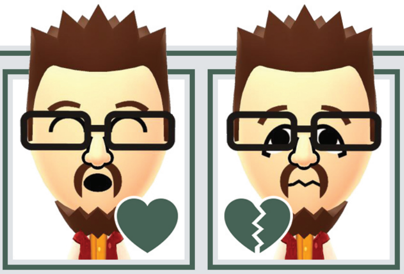
The highlight of the site is the video you can click to play in its center. It's styled as a 30-second television ad the likes of which you'd see running at 3:00 in the morning on a local broadcast network – which is already hilarious – but its best part is its music. They actually brought back the theme song from The Super Mario Bros. Super Show!

"We're the Mario brothers, and plumbing's our game. We're not like the others who get all the fame!" and so on. Let me tell you, as someone who was a kid in the '80s and first heard that song sung back then, my heart was warmed to hear it return!

There's more! The site recommends calling or texting 929-55-MARIO, and if you do, it actually works! The number connects you to a marketing service called Community (which breaks the immersion a bit), but the end result is some fun texts and even promotional images like phone wallpapers sent straight to your device. (Meanwhile, clicking around on the website might just net you some PC-sized wallpapers to enjoy as well.)

All in all, SMBPlumbing.com, the ad that goes along with it and the functioning phone number are a ton of fun – I think the Mario movie's marketing is off to a great start! **– LUCAS**

Great! The Super Show theme song is coming back!



Oh. I can't really hire Mario and Luigi to fix my sink.

FORECAST

A meteorological look at the biggest game and DLC releases currently scheduled to debut in the next few months.

WE'VE ALREADY MET Young Link. We're familiar with Baby Mario. We've even seen Samus as a youngster! (In our own NF-exclusive comics, but still.) Now it's time to say hello to Young Bayonetta! Cereza and the Lost Demon tells a tale that takes place before this series' hair-raising heroine grew up and grew out her lengthy locks. Rather, she's more like Goldilocks! Take a look for yourself on Page 39 to prepare for her March 17 debut!

BEYOND BABY BAYONETTA, Nintendo's lineup heading into the season of Spring is a little light – perhaps they actually want to draw attention away from their video games for a little while so that fans can head to movie theaters instead! The Super Mario Bros. Movie opens on silver screens around the States on April 7. Flip to Page 36 for more!

CAPCOM'S STILL CRAZY about collections, and another long-awaited one is on its way on April 14: the Mega Man Battle Network Legacy Collection! It will combine six different games from the Battle Network series into a single retail package. (Or 10, if you want to count all the separate versions individually.) I've got my fingers crossed that this one sells well, to keep Capcom interested in giving us more Mega Man! See Page 42.

ADVANCE WARS LIVES! Holy cow, sports fans – I was just about ready to give up hope. But after a delay of over a year (which wasn't even its first delay!), Advance Wars 1+2: Re-Boot Camp has again been given a new official release date: April 21, 2023. (Now I've got my fingers double-crossed that this is the date that sticks. No more delays, please!)

IN ITS NEW position, Advance Wars will serve as the final first-party title to roll out before Nintendo's heaviest hitter of the year drops and begins to dominate the fandom's discussions for probably the rest of 2023. (And beyond!) The Legend of Zelda: Tears of the Kingdom is still set to arrive on May 12, 2023. We'll have a big blowout next time, but for now we've prepped a fresh one-page preview to tide you over. See Page 47!

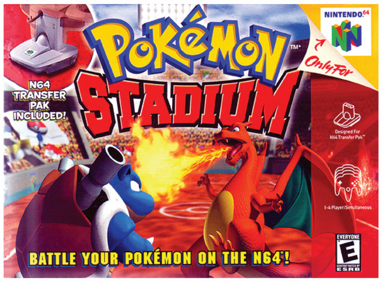
RUMORS HAVE STARTED swirling that Nintendo will be easing off the gas on Switch game development after Zelda's launch, and that the rest of the year will not have many big-name titles to speak of. But even if that's true, Pikmin 4 would be more than enough for me! It's due to debut on July 21, and we've got new features to discuss on Page 45!

> A brand-new Mario movie hitting theaters after 30 years? A brand-new, totally massive Zelda sequel hitting the Switch six years after Breath of the Wild? An all-new Pikmin to look forward to (a full decade past Pikmin 3's release) *and* Advance Wars is finally back on the release schedule instead of being stuck in "TBA" land? I don't think I could ask for anything more! This is one of the best Forecasts I've seen in years! Great weather is on the horizon! – **LUCAS**

YOU'RE JUST A few page flips away from our avalanche of Nintendo 64 - Nintendo Switch Online reviews, as we're going to evaluate every game that's already available through that app. But there are still more to come after that!

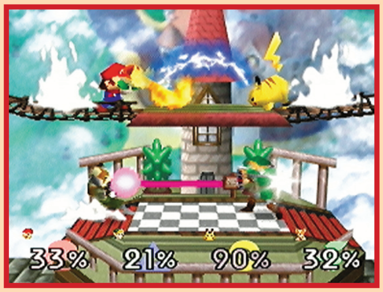
Nintendo has officially confirmed five further Nintendo 64 titles due to debut on NSO later in 2023. They include the energetic motocross action of Excitebike 64, the extreme slope shredding of 1080° Snowboarding, the cellular shopping excitement of Mario Party 3 and a double dose of Pocket Monster battling in both Pokémon Stadium and Pokémon Stadium 2. There's not a bad game in that bunch – though the Stadium titles might be limited if you can't transfer teams of monsters raised in the Game Boy games over to them.

. . . Though maybe we will be able to? Game Boy has just received its own NSO app at long last, and it could be possible that Pokémon Red, Blue, Yellow, Gold, Silver or Crystal could pop up there. They were each re-released once before through the 3DS Virtual Console, so it's not unprecedented! (Fingers triple-crossed that we'll get them and have some cross-app action to bring 'mons over to the N64 games!)



TOP 10 MOST WANTED

Nintendo Switch Online



SUPER SMASH BROS.

C'MON, HOW HAS this one *not* made it onto the Switch yet? Not only is the original Super Smash Bros. still a beloved four-player party standard from one of Nintendo's most nostalgic consoles, but with Masahiro Sakurai looking back over his career and experiences with his recent educational YouTube channel, this game now exists as a sort of required reading for anyone devoutly studying his videos. There's so much to be learned from the original Smash in tandem with Sakurai's lectures – and that's all on top of the game remaining a ton of fun with a couch full of friends to this day!

With just about every other major Nintendo-published game already living happily within the app, Super Smash Bros. stands out as a sorely missing must-have. **– JOHN-CHARLES**

MISCHIEF MAKERS

SUPER MARIO 64 killed sidescrolling platformers! Well, not really, but that's how I felt when my favorite genre all but vanished during the leap into the third dimension. So of course I shot to attention when I saw the decidedly 2D Mischief Makers, the first non-Sega project from the character action wizards at Treasure, known for such legendary titles as Gunstar Heroes.

Mischief Makers had it all, including ever-shifting game styles, characters and objects all sporting the creepy countenance of Scream's Ghostface, a sentai squad of anthropomorphic soldiers with transforming animal robots and a robotic heroine who solved problems by shaking them. Such cleverness and innovation deserves to be shared with a new generation – one more accepting of its 2D presentation than those bougie brats of the late '90s! **– TONY**

BLAST CORPS

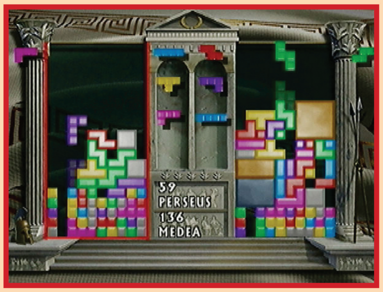
I REMEMBER BEING excited about this Rare-developed title when first reading about it in Nintendo Power – wrecking towns and cities with construction equipment, racers and large mechs sounded fun!

Blast Corps was part puzzler, part racer, part action game and part escort mission. You often had to retry levels multiple times to map out where you had to be to clear a path for the slow-moving but incredibly dangerous and out-of-control nuclear missile carrier (which was the premise for all of the necessary destruction). But the real enemy was the clock, as earning medals and unlocking special levels had to be earned, as was the schtick in many titles of that era.

It's still one of the most unique Rare titles out there, and definitely stands the test of time. Let's join the Corps once more! **– BRETT**

BANJO-TOOIE

BANJO AND KAZOOIE'S first quest is already on NSO, but this dynamic duo came back for one more adventure on the N64, and it's arguably an even more impressive one! Banjo-Tooie sees the return of the evil Gruntilda, who's been trapped underground so long that she became an animated skeleton. She wants a new body and revenge on our heroes, and what better way to get those than to fire a laser beam that can pull the life force out of everything in Banjo's neighborhood? This game is packed with massive worlds and even more jokes than the original. Want to help out a divorced pterosaur dad? Witness a tragic ice cube romance? Transform into a washing machine and clean the overalls of a bunch of blue collar rabbits? . . . OK, that last one sounds weird, but still! You can do all of these things and much more! **– LINDSEY**



THE NEW TETRIS

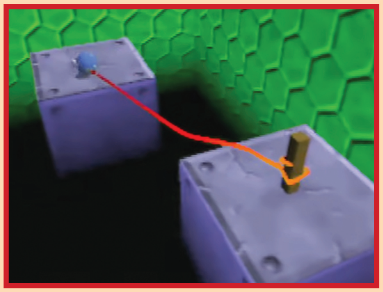
WHY BOTHER WITH The New Tetris when Tetris 99 and Puyo Puyo Tetris already exist on the Switch? It's all about the blocks!

Besides its cool presentation based on the seven wonders of the world, intense four-player matches, "spin moves" that can clear your screen and its killer soundtrack, The New Tetris introduced a feature called "blocks." Whenever you make a 4x4 square out of four pieces, they congeal together. If you use two different kinds, the block will become silver and every line you make out of it will be worth five. If you manage to make it out of four of the same piece, you get a gold block with lines worth 10! This metagame changes the way you look at the board, and makes this unique Tetris game well worth its stellar reputation. **— KRIS**

MEGA MAN 64

MEGA MAN LEGENDS is simply resplendent. Unfortunately, it hasn't gotten much easier to play over the years; in fact, if anything, it's getting harder to find any way to play as time goes on! And while it's not the *ideal* way to play the game, at least having Mega Man 64 as a part of Nintendo Switch Online would provide *a* way to experience this adventure on modern hardware.

We can still hope for a release of a Mega Man Legends Legacy Collection from Capcom, of course. Fans have been asking them for that one for years, to no avail so far. But having Mega Man 64 available to play as an included part of the Nintendo Switch Online Expansion Pack might help expose it to new players and make the voices crying out for a collection or remake just a bit louder. **— DAVID**



CHAMELEON TWIST

CHAMELEON TWIST IS short, sweet and just perfect for a relaxing evening playing video games.

The premise is simple: You're a chameleon who followed a white rabbit down a magical portal, and BOOM! You've been transformed into an anime mascot ready to go on an adventure.

On the surface it may seem like a typical 3D platformer, but there's, well, a twist! You can extend your long tongue and use the analog stick to guide it in any path you want, including winding squiggles and wide curves. The tongue can pick up multiple enemies at once (perfect for firing back at your foes!) or wrap around posts to allow you to swing your body to distant ledges. It's a snappy little game for anyone in the mood for a light, charming experience. **— LINDSEY**

TETRISPHERE

THE NEW TETRIS wasn't the only new Tetris on the N64! In addition to that twist on traditional 2D Tetris, we also got this wildly divergent new 3D spin on the block-dropping series.

In Tetrisphere, the playing pieces have been used to build a fully rotatable globe. Players can spin the sphere in all directions, and must do so in order to line up more blocks to drop – making a match with a block of the same shape already on the surface causes both to be destroyed, as well as triggering any other connected pieces to go kaboom in a combo. Ultimately the goal is to drill down into the center of the sphere to rescue a little friend trapped in the interior!

Beyond that innovative gameplay, Tetrisphere has an absolutely amazing soundtrack. I'd argue it's the best in the whole N64 library! Seek it out and give it a listen online! **— LUCAS**

DIDDY KONG RACING

LET'S RACE BACK over to Rare as we round things out here, because, well, it's hard not to! They made many of the best Nintendo 64 games, and even though they're now owned by Microsoft (and have been for years), both Banjo-Kazooie and GoldenEye have still made it into the NSO lineup. So it doesn't feel too insane to hope for more!

Diddy Kong Racing would be another great addition. Somehow released in the same year as Mario Kart 64, this game eclipsed that one in several ways: being totally 3D, having a full story mode and adding both airplanes and hovercrafts to the karts for three-way racing action. Not to mention the classic lineup of characters, like Tiptup the Turtle, Bumper the Badger and a poor rooster named Drumstick! It'd be great to get to race with them all again! **— LUCAS**

DONKEY KONG 64

FINALLY, LET'S END with one more game that was developed by Rare, but is also the one I feel has the highest likelihood of making an N64 NSO encore before the Switch era ends. (Especially since it was already re-released once, as a Wii U Virtual Console game back in 2015.)

Donkey Kong 64 is the ultimate collectathon: If you like to run around picking up different items, then boy howdy, is this the game for you! Bananas. Coins. Medals. Blueprints. All kinds of things that have to be gathered to unlock all kinds of other things. And almost all color-coded to the five different playable characters: Donkey, Diddy, Chunky, Lanky and Tiny. It's a lot!

I think Nintendo will want to use D.K. in a 3D platformer again in the future, and reissuing this adventure would help prep players for such a return. So here's hoping NSO gets it! **— LUCAS**

A Cinematic Platformer

Flashback to 1992 with the retro look of Lunark.

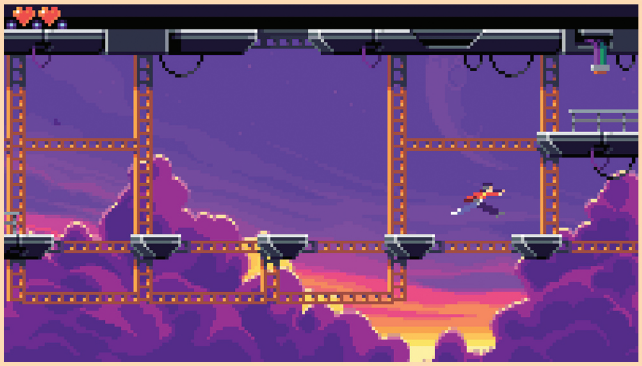
JORDAN MECHNER MUST be proud.

It's been about 33 years since his original Prince of Persia game made its first appearance. It was a trailblazing work – at a time when platforming games were defined by simplicity and speed, Mechner made a game that was deliberately slower. More intentioned. More complex to control, and much more expertly animated! Prince of Persia was so divergent from the norm that it established an all-new sub-genre in the industry – the cinematic platformer – and in the last 33 years, its legacy has lived on not only through continued direct sequels, but also in the game design DNA other creators have spliced into their own works.

Works like the upcoming Lunark! Set to debut in the Switch eShop soon, this cinematic platformer revives a lot of the style of the oldest Prince of Persia titles, but shifts the setting to a futuristic colony on the moon. You play as a hero named Leo, running, rolling, climbing and shooting your way through boldly, brightly colorful environments. You'll notice at first glance, though, that the environments and characters in Lunark are rendered with a deliberately low level of detail. Leo himself is composed of only a handful of pixels; the world around him looks like it's built out of chunky blocks. The lack of visual definition persists into cutscenes, where the most striking style choice is the fact that Leo has no visible face!

All of that might seem shocking to younger players, but it's all homage. First to Prince of Persia, but more directly to Flashback, a game that came out a few years after the Prince's first quest and added these kinds of faceless, low-color cutscenes to Mechner's original gameplay template. Back then – and I believe the Lunark developers have used the same technique here – the games' artists would record videos of people performing the exact actions they wanted to depict in the cutscenes, then paint over those clips with pixels to bring their game hero to life. It's a nearly lost art called rotoscoping, and it's great to see it back in action here!

So the striking cutscenes get an early thumbs-up from me . . . but I'm going to wait to pass judgment on the super-blocky low-res gameplay. I've played some games in the past with styles like this that ended up being *too* abstract, such that you couldn't tell what some objects in the environment were. Hopefully Lunark doesn't have that problem, but we'll see for sure soon! **– LUCAS**



Paying Dracula Tribute

Dead Cells: Return to Castlevania reawakens Konami's dormant brand.

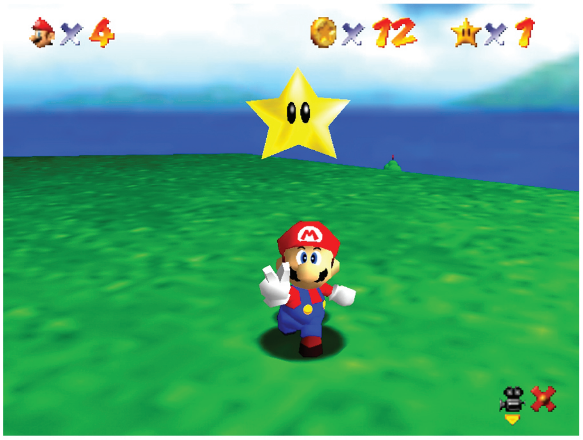
IN THE LAST 10 years, the relationship between Dracula, his son Alucard and the vampire-hunting Belmont family has made for a successful Netflix show, a selling point for Super Smash Bros. Ultimate and an ongoing comic in this very magazine. The only place it hasn't proven to work anymore is in actual video games! The last time we saw an official home release in the franchise was back in 2014, with Lords of Shadow 2 (which didn't even come to a Nintendo system!). But if these vamps and scamps have taught us anything over the years, it's that they're prone to popping up in the most unlikely of places. Case in point, instead of starring in a whole new game, Drac and his grody gang of supporting players are set to star in a new DLC module for Dead Cells later this year!

This gravely shocking development makes more sense when you look at the numbers. While Castlevania is the more famous name, Dead Cells has sales on its side. As of this year, the 2D action roguelike has sold over 5,000,000 copies on mobile alone! That's not even counting consoles! No Castlevania game has even come close to that! The fact that Dead Cells stars a monster who could have easily been a 'Vania boss only sweetens the deal. With his noggin of fire, one piercing eye and armory of supernatural weapons, The Beheaded would have been a seamless addition to the bestiary of Symphony of the Night or Dawn of Sorrow (two beloved titles from the Castlevania history books).

The developers at Motion Twin seem determined to make this DLC just as beloved as either of those two titles. It's set to be about twice as big as past Dead Cells DLC campaigns, with 14 new weapons, two new biomes, three bosses and a full soundtrack, all set to the Castlevania theme. Fans of both brands will be fighting through this not-so-miserable pile of secrets for a long time until they've seen it all.

Drinking deep from the essence of Dead Cells, instead of the usual blood cells, isn't how we expected to see the undead cast of Castlevania to rise from their graves. But after putting the pieces together, this unholy marriage of franchises feels like a perfect fit.

Dead Cells: Return to Castlevania will cost $9.99 and is due to debut soon: on March 6! Prepare yourself to venture back into Dracula's castle! **– JONATHAN**



The 3D Trailblazer
SUPER MARIO 64

NINTENDO SWITCH ONLINE officially added Nintendo 64 titles to its lineup with the launch of the Expansion Pack subscription tier in October 2021, but we've held off on reviewing any of its re-released N64 titles . . . until now! Because what better way could there be to kill two birds with one stone: We get to evaluate the modern playability of these titles today while also soaking up all the '90s nostalgia they hold. Perfect for NF #64!

We're beginning back at the N64's own beginning, with its ground-breaking Day 1 launch title and system showpiece, Super Mario 64 . . . but we have to immediately swerve to avoid a pretty big roadblock. This game already came to the Switch once before!

Super Mario 64 was one of three titles included in the Super Mario 3D All-Stars collection that went on sale in September 2020. We just reviewed it 15 issues ago – not that far back into the past. And unfortunately, with my memory of that release still fresh, I could tell that this newer N64 NSO version didn't quite measure up.

I went back to play the 3D All-Stars version again for direct comparison – it runs at a higher resolution, so it looks a bit better. But its biggest difference is in its controls. 3D All-Stars Super Mario 64 has had its controls specifically adjusted to account for Switch Joy-Cons and Pro Controllers, so playing it you get natural button placements for jumping, attacking and camera movement. Meanwhile, the default control scheme through the NSO's Nintendo 64 app is out of whack – with no option to adjust it in the app itself. You'd need to go into the Switch hardware's settings and remap the buttons yourself to make them more comfortable to use.

It is profoundly odd. When else in Nintendo history has the company reissued a classic game in one year, then reissued that very same classic game in the following year, but with worse visuals and play control? It made for a poor first impression for the NSO Expansion Pack as a whole, honestly (and maybe that's why, subconciously, I didn't want to review its games before now).

Super Mario 64 remains an iconic platformer, and a game all Mario fans should play. But on the Switch, this NSO version is second-best. Seek out the 3D All-Stars edition for a better experience! **– LUCAS**

7.0

N64 NSO PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: NINTENDO
ORIGINAL RELEASE: SEPTEMBER 29, 1996

Smoother Soaring
PILOTWINGS 64

AFTER OVER 25 years of being stuck on the Nintendo 64, Pilotwings 64 is finally available on a modern platform – and Nintendo has done quite a bit to make it look and (mostly) play better than ever!

If you're familiar with the original Pilotwings on Super NES, you'll know more or less what to expect out of its sequel. There are no enemies to dodge or bosses to overcome; this is a game about being in a flight school and learning the skills it takes to get your pilot's license. You'll do this by flying through rings, shooting targets in the sky, completing time trials and a whole lot more. There's hang gliding, skydiving, gyrocopter-ing, and even a jetpack (that's called a rocket belt for some reason).

The first thing that you'll notice about this version, especially if you've spent any time with the N64 original, is how good it looks. The textures have been cleaned up significantly, and the whole game runs considerably smoother than ever before. It's not a consistent 60fps, but it's pretty darn close. The controls feel nice too – with the exception of the Birdman stages, which are now quite janky. (It's theorized that the NSO emulator's framerate increase isn't meshing well with the programming's code for flapping the Birdman's wings.) It's manageable once you get the hang of it, but if you've been a fan of this game since the '90s, it'll bother you.

Arguably the most useful addition is the ability to create save states. Pilotwings 64 stages are often pretty long and require mastery of multiple elements in order to earn medals. You might find bursting a series of balloons particularly easy, but then you can't quite get the hang of which angle to use when approaching the landing strip. Just create a save state after the balloon segment, and now you can practice your landing without having to repeat the first half of the level over and over. It makes completing the game feel much more attainable and less tedious, which is never a bad thing.

Like the other games in its series, Pilotwings 64 offers a much more laid-back experience than your traditional action game. Things can get intense, but the nice-looking environments and chill music maintain the unique vibe the Pilotwings series is known for. This is one flight you won't want to miss! **– KRIS**

8.0

N64 NSO PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: NINTENDO
ORIGINAL RELEASE: SEPTEMBER 29, 1996

Fun with Physics

WAVE RACE 64

EVER SINCE THE jump to three dimensions beginning with the N64, Nintendo has somehow managed to punch well above their weight with incredible portrayals of virtual water. That legacy started right here with Wave Race 64, a launch window title for the console that was shockingly the massive glow-up to an earlier Game Boy game.

Make no mistake, Wave Race 64 is, to this day, more than just a flashy rendering showcase for the hardware – its impressively realistic ocean physics come into play during each race, as players have to quickly calculate the pitch and angle of every jump and turn as they slice through the violent waves of the game's nine aquatic courses. These high-speed Kawasaki™ jetski races still offer exciting fun today on the NSO app, but the relaxing azure visuals, dolphin-filled shoals and chill soundtrack (heavy on city pop) deliver an experience that ends up feeling way more zen than expected. (Not too unlike its vehicular contemporary, Pilotwings.)

If you do find yourself needing a cooldown from some of the more challenging races, a stunt mode offers a more free-roaming solo experience by racking up high scores with some of the wettest stunts this side of Tony Hawk – though new players may want an online guide handy with a list of tricks in lieu of any sort of digital manual. Believe it or not, those things used to be filled with vital information, kids!

Fans of Nintendo's 3D sports and racing output owe it to themselves to take Wave Race 64 for a spin. While there are certainly other high-energy racing games available just through this NSO app alone, this title offers a more leisurely approach to extreme sports. It makes for a surprisingly relaxing retreat on the couch at home – or maybe even from the dock of some vacation watercraft, for the ultimate immersive experience!

With both memorable visuals and gameplay, Wave Race 64 still feels right at home on the Switch . . . though it still begs the question of whether the series will ever see a more modern revival after its final and decidedly "extreme" entry on the GameCube: 2001's Wave Race: Blue Storm.

For now, we'll just have to settle for the eternal vibes of gliding across a sunset horizon with a pod of dolphins at our side. **– JOHN-CHARLES**

8.0

N64 NSO PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: NINTENDO
ORIGINAL RELEASE: NOVEMBER 4, 1996

Blue Shell Origins

MARIO KART 64

JETSKIS MAY HAVE been the first to race on the N64, but go-karts got their start a few months later thanks to Mario Kart 64!

As just the second game ever made in the Mario Kart series, this N64 sequel had a huge opportunity to refine the design first laid down in its SNES predecessor, and pave a roadway for future installments too. It did so wonderfully!

For starters, this Kart brought the series into true 3D for the first time, leaving the Mode 7 faux-3D visual trick in the past. Now every track was built out of real polygons, giving each race a greater sense of depth.

. . . Though not each racer. The characters, their karts and most of the items they unleashed against one another were still 2D sprites! Though it was hard to tell in '97 on an old CRT – they just looked great! They're a little less great now that the classic fuzziness of viewing these games has been banished, as it's much easier to see the sharp edges surrounding each character. Even still, I think that just makes it easier to appreciate the original designers' inventiveness.

Mario Kart 64 was also the origin point for the infamous Blue Shell, the item that heat-seeks its way straight to whoever's currently leading the pack and blows them to kingdom come – it's become an iconic, enduring menace in the series. This game additionally emphasized drifting much more than before, awarding speed boosts to players skilled enough to carve their way through turns and wiggle the Control Stick back and forth with proper timing.

It's a joy to revisit all of these elements through NSO – but not everything is perfect with this port. Emulating Mario Kart 64 correctly has always been difficult – elements like the video screen that appears in the first course have commonly glitched out across decades' worth of different emulators. That part, at least, seems to work fine here, but other aspects seem a bit broken. In my time playing the game I've had a full loss of background music on several occasions, making for really boring races accented by only sound effects. I've also seen rival racers just disappear in front of me, or lift up into the sky out of nowhere! So this one's worth a play, but it could use another pass of polish. **– LUCAS**

7.5

N64 NSO PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: NINTENDO
ORIGINAL RELEASE: FEBRUARY 10, 1997

Do a Barrel Roll!
STAR FOX 64

I HAPPEN TO consider Star Fox 64 to be one of my personal Top 10 favorite video games of all time, and after playing it again on the Nintendo Switch, I'm pleased to report that it will be retaining that ranking.

Though it was the third Star Fox game ever made, Star Fox 64 was the second to be published – Nintendo had canned plans to launch Star Fox 2 in the home stretch of the SNES generation in order to make a cleaner break from the 16-bit era (and because Star Fox 2, as a 3D game, might've lessened the wow factor for gamers seeing the 3D-focused N64 for the first time). That whole situation stank for Star Fox 2, but it did set up this 64-bit follow-up to seem even more stunning than it otherwise would've.

I think Star Fox 64 may have been the first truly great-looking Nintendo 64 game. That's because instead of trying to render rounded human forms like Mario's out of a handful of polygons, all of Star Fox's on-screen stars were angular spaceships: perfectly suited to be done justice even by the N64's limited 3D abilities. Fox's Arwing looked incredible even in 1997, and the resolution bump provided by the NSO emulator on Switch makes its visual appeal soar even higher.

Star Fox 64 also shocked players on the audio side of the equation, as the first title from Nintendo to prominently feature voice acting. Fox and his teammates' chatter had been represented by hilariously likeable jibberjabber on the SNES, but here each line spoken in the midst of fierce firefights came through in actual English. Dialogue like "Do a barrel roll!" and "Fox, get this guy off me!" became instantly iconic.

How about the Rumble Pak? Star Fox 64 was the first video game to offer haptic feedback – actually physically shaking the controller to sync up with on-screen explosions and collisions. It was incredible!

I loved this game on N64 for all those reasons and more, and I implore you to play it if you never have before. Even better, it's easier to get into than ever on NSO: The built-in save states can help you achieve goals like hitting specific score targets in some stages to earn medals and open up paths to harder levels. You can try, try again until you get it just right. That's great! **– LUCAS**

9.5

N64 NSO PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: NINTENDO
ORIGINAL RELEASE: JUNE 30, 1997

A Lesser Adventure
YOSHI'S STORY

I WAS 15 when the Nintendo 64 first went on sale, and its generation held on until I was a few years into my college experience – basically perfectly aligned with my late teenage phase when I really got to be knowledgeable about everything new with Nintendo. I was there on Day 1 when big new games went on sale. I'd show up to buy things even the store clerks didn't know they had in stock! I never missed a hit.

. . . I totally skipped Yoshi's Story.

It was no mistake on my part. I deliberately snubbed this so-called sequel to the SNES epic Yoshi's Island, as from the early looks I'd had at the game from Nintendo Power and online coverage, I could tell that it just wasn't going to measure up to that masterpiece. Now almost exactly 25 years later (happy anniversary, Yoshi's Story, I guess?), I remain confident that my first impression was the correct one. Yoshi's Story stinks.

Its first problem is that it's imprecise. Yoshi's Island was a tight, totally responsive platformer that excelled with its play control; Yoshi's Story feels like it's been smeared with butter. Rather than make the game playable with the perfectly functional D-Pad on the N64 controller, the developers instead forced players to use the newer, fancier analog stick – and the result is a frustratingly slippery feeling to Yoshi's movements. It's incredibly hard to move him with enough precision to land on small platforms with any level of consistency, and that remains true when using a Joy-Con or Pro Controller with this Switch Online version too.

Another issue is that the game is unfocused. Yoshi's Island had great level design, with each stage always ending with either finding a goal ring or beating a boss; Yoshi's Story instead presents a totally freewheeling scattershot approach to stages that force you to just meander in all directions, seeking out and eating fruit. Once you chomp 30 pieces, the level ends on the spot, no matter where in the level you are. That's just odd.

Its challenge is wildly inconsistent: Some levels are cakewalks seemingly built for babies, but then you get hit with extremely harsh penalties for things like falling in pits.

I could complain further, but I think I've made my case. Yoshi's Island is in the SNES NSO app. Play that instead! **– LUCAS**

5.0

N64 NSO PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: NINTENDO
ORIGINAL RELEASE: MARCH 10, 1998

Bear Meets Bird
BANJO-KAZOOIE

DO YOU WANT to know more about the cartoon bear and bird from Super Smash Bros., but you weren't born roughly 1,000 years ago? Well you're in luck, because Banjo-Kazooie is available on Nintendo Switch!

Back in the day people were put off by the game's exceptionally silly name, but Banjo-Kazooie quickly won everyone over with its colorful characters, wacky humor and surprisingly expressive animation.

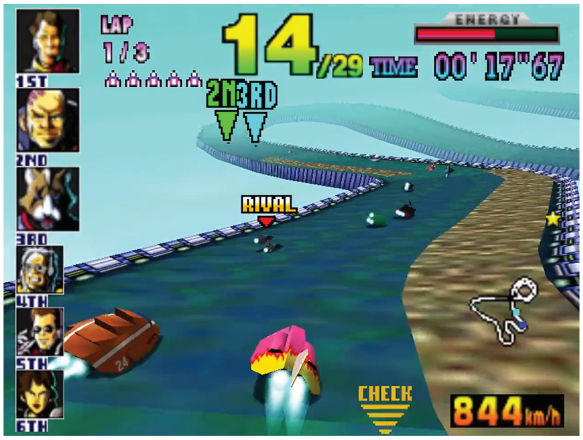
Our heroes' quest takes them into the lair of the evil Gruntilda, a witch who has kidnapped Banjo's sister in an effort to steal her cuteness. You'll need magical jigsaw puzzle pieces to proceed – and to get those, you'll need to do a lot of collecting! Each world is jam-packed with items and resources, cleverly laid out in such a way that you're constantly being lead to new puzzles and new surprises. Every environment is lovingly rendered in impressive detail for the era; whether you're soaring past the enormous snowman of Freezeezy Peak or exploring the haunted church of Mad Monster Mansion, you really feel like you're a toon in a wacky animated short. Especially since almost every character has funny googly eyes!

Speaking of which, the game itself has a ton of character. The save files have unique animations, and there's even a chance that they'll launch Banjo off-screen! Practically every object and item talks to you! There's a sphinx with a head cold! You can help a giant mechanical shark with a stomach full of obstacle courses! Characters openly discuss the sequel! You can become an alligator wearing sneakers! There are snakes that eat holiday lights! Banjo sometimes turns into a washing machine, because why not? Not to mention hidden collectables such as the Mystery Eggs and the Ice Key, which have so much history behind them that there isn't enough space here to write about it all!

The Switch Online port fared much better than some of its peers, but still isn't perfect. The controls are awkward on a Pro Controller, disorienting for veterans and somewhat confusing for newcomers. Some blur and fog effects are missing, resulting in a less visually stunning experience. Overall it isn't quite as nice as the original N64 release, but it's close enough that new players can still enjoy this celebrated classic.
– LINDSEY

9.0

N64 NSO PUBLISHER: NINTENDO DEVELOPER: RARE ORIGINAL RELEASE: JUNE 29, 1998



Racing Exhiliration
F-ZERO X

I'VE PLAYED MANY superfast racers in my gaming career – like the Wipeout series, Redout and Pacer – but you never forget your first: F-Zero on SNES. I was surprised that it never got a sequel on its starting system (not in the West, at least), but that definitely built the hype for the N64 version.

With corkscrews, halfpipes, twisted tunnels and a multitude of new vehicles and racers, F-Zero X blew the original SNES game out of the water. I certainly didn't remember how hard it is! Having to beat the cups on all the difficulties to unlock all of the characters is such a chore, and may turn off modern gamers. The cars and racers are only slightly different when playing, but subtle differences pay off in the tougher races.

I hope that Nintendo releases SP versions of the games that have all of the unlocks already available in games like this and GoldenEye, like they did for some NES and SNES titles!

Playing on the TV I noticed very little difference versus playing on my original Nintendo 64 system, aside from everything being crisper because I wasn't playing on a CRT like I did in the '90s. It is a pretty dated release, with very little detail on most polygonal objects due to the pace of the game. But in a title like this, it's only the speed that matters! The gameplay is largely learning to control your racer at high speeds with challenging turns, jumps and other obstacles.

Something that did bring me right back to 1998 was the amazing soundtrack. Track after track of metal-inspired bangers and remixes from the first game. So much of the audio was super nostalgic and fun to revisit!

When playing in Handheld Mode, the framerate drops a bit, and that can affect gameplay detrimentally in critical areas – which can easily be a dealbreaker. I still had a blast in Death Race mode, and beating it all again would be rewarding, if I hadn't done it all before.

It is a shame that this release didn't get the Disk Drive expansion that was released for the N64DD. It had a track creator, a car editor and 12 extra tracks. Nothing says Nintendo can't release it later, but it would've been a real head-turner if it was all there – and brand-new to most gamers! **– BRETT**

7.0

N64 NSO PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: NINTENDO ORIGINAL RELEASE: OCTOBER 26, 1998

Link Sets Out for a Sixth Time

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: OCARINA OF TIME

I SUPPOSE IT'S appropriate that the first Zelda game to focus its story on time travel is the one that keeps drawing me back into the past.

Since it first launched on the N64 in November 1998, The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time has officially been made available from Nintendo five more times. Its second release was a GameCube port. Then it came to the Wii as a Virtual Console title. It got a 3DS remake after that, then the original returned in download form again on the Wii U. Finally, its most recent encore appeared on the Switch as part of the Day 1 launch lineup for the N64 NSO expansion.

It's a lot of different versions! And I've been pulled back into this trail-blazing first 3D Hyrule time and time again as I've played each one.

Though the last time didn't go so well. When I reviewed the Wii U VC version back in NF #17, I got aggravated by its poor controls – the analog stick on the GamePad was set to some totally different degree of sensitivity than it should have been, which made moments like lining up a Hookshot shot feel maddening.

It's better on Switch. The controls still have that old N64 clunk to them, and there's still weirdness like the C Buttons being mapped to different directional flicks of the right analog stick, but overall I haven't felt as frustrated in my latest trek across this classic take on the kingdom.

Speaking of the kingdom (and the fast-approaching "Tears of"), I have to recommend that newer Zelda fans give this game a try if you never have before. Especially since there's still a couple of months left before the new series sequel will sweep into the spotlight! Ocarina of Time's many innovations should be experienced firsthand, as when you sit down and see for yourself the first-ever 3D dungeons, the first "Z-Targeting," the first horseback ride and more, you'll just appreciate how much further the franchise has come all the more!

And, honestly, there's still a lot of magic to discover here. Though it's just about to turn 25 years old, many of the puzzles, characters and gameplay concepts still feel fresh and truly delightful today.

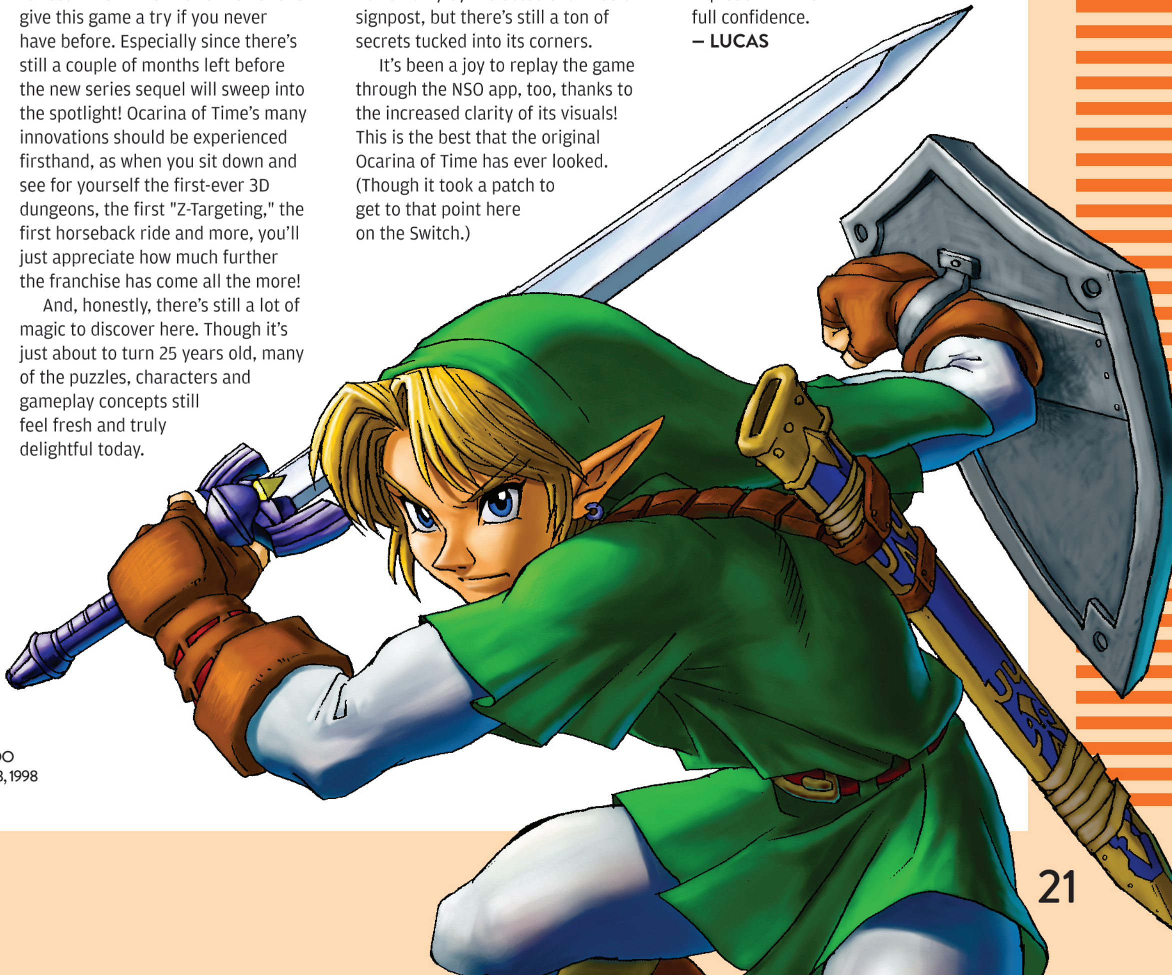
I sometimes forget how much there is to see and do in Ocarina of Time. Going years between play-throughs and only experiencing this world in the interim through things like speedruns, it's easy to misremember that the game is more sparse and empty than it is! Yes, it's marked by lots of aging elements like the wide-open Hyrule Field that's dotted only by the occasional tree or signpost, but there's still a ton of secrets tucked into its corners.

It's been a joy to replay the game through the NSO app, too, thanks to the increased clarity of its visuals! This is the best that the original Ocarina of Time has ever looked. (Though it took a patch to get to that point here on the Switch.)

Ocarina of Time's Switch emulation went a bit viral for being borked when the N64 NSO first launched, with some visual effects like the reflective water in the Water Temple Dark Link mid-boss room being totally screwed up. But, thankfully, Nintendo's programmers took swift action and fixed it all up not too long after launch. So if you got scared away by that early negative press, be reassured! You can take this trip back in time with full confidence.

– LUCAS

8.5



N64 NSO

PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: NINTENDO
ORIGINAL RELEASE: NOVEMBER 23, 1998

Don't Hurt Your Hands
MARIO PARTY

THERE'S BEEN A mutiny in the Thomas home.

My family loves to play Mario Party games together. For the most part that's meant Super Mario Party in its 2-on-2 Partner Party mode, which has allowed our older boys to each be paired with a parent several times over the last few years. We've also spent some time with the single-player parties of Mario Party Superstars, but decided collectively that 2-on-2 was the better mode, so we've mostly gone back to Super Mario Party since.

Wanna know which game we'll probably never go back to? Ever? This one. Mario Party 1. The origin point of the series that kicked off the whole saga back on the Nintendo 64.

And that's not coming from me! I'd be happy to play it more. But I've been outvoted – quite vocally so – and I doubt I'll ever get my way again.

Mario Party joined the NSO lineup last November, just a few days before Carter's birthday. What perfect timing! I sat the family down, passed the controllers around and fired up a party on, of course, the Peach's Birthday Cake map. It was about to be a great time for us all!

It was not.

Since I grew up with the earliest Party games and knew what to expect, I was smiling throughout – but Mary, Carter and Calvin rebelled from the beginning. It's hard to have your first real experience with a series be a modern sequel with modern refinements, modern graphics and plenty of polish, then to turn the clock back a couple of decades and try to play a predecessor that lacks all of those qualities. If you get yourself into the right mindset then it can work – that kind of defines the experience of going back to any of these N64 titles now – but something about Mario Party 1 just can't connect with anyone who didn't first suffer through it in 1999.

I'm honestly surprised Nintendo brought this one back instead of just giving us Party 2 alone, as Party 1 infamously includes stick-spinning minigames that literally injured players year ago. It was kind of a PR nightmare! Try not to hurt yourself if you decide to take this game for a spin.

. . . That is, if your family lets you. You might get just one shot at it! **– LUCAS**

6.0

N64 NSO PUBLISHER: NINTENDO DEVELOPER: HUDSON SOFT ORIGINAL RELEASE: FEBRUARY 8, 1999

Photo Safari on Rails
POKÉMON SNAP

I NEVER HAD an N64 growing up – that controller was *intimidating* – so I never got to play any of its Pokémon spin-offs. Since Pokémon Snap had been one of the console's most loved titles, and we finally got a sequel in 2021, I decided that now was the time to give it a chance! I was wary about how the controls would translate from the original controller to the Pro Controller (after reading about the extensive button remapping some players use for Ocarina of Time), but aside from one small change to the camera controls, Todd Snap was off on his Pokémon photo safari!

Your objective is to catch 'em all – on film – in various natural environments, in an experience that reminded me of amusement park rides. (And this would be a perfect addition to Super Nintendo World!) After you've traveled through an area and taken a few good shots, you send them to Professor Oak for evaluation on size, position, and if the Pokémon you photographed is doing something out of the ordinary.

Along the way, you're given new tools to use – such as food or Pester Balls – to help coax Pokémon out of hiding or discover hidden passages to new areas. Every area has fun secrets to discover, like a majestic Moltres hatching from an egg or a surfboard lying on the beach, waiting for a Pikachu to hang ten!

While the graphics are certainly dated, the experience still holds up after all these years. The drawback is that it's like a fun-sized candy bar: What's there is good, but there's only a little of it. Only about a third of the original 151 Pokémon are represented, and the whole game can be played to completion in just a couple of hours. It can also be irritating to go back through an entire level to capture that one elusive shot and not being in the right position to do so. But save states can help with that!

I'm happy to have finally experienced this missing part of my Pokémon fandom, and it makes me want to dive into the world of New Pokémon Snap. This is one of the best Nintendo 64 games on Nintendo Switch Online to play with young kids, or if you're looking for a Gen I nostalgia bomb. So give it a chance now, even if you were also too intimidated to try anything on the N64 back in the '90s! **– REBECCA**

7.5

N64 NSO PUBLISHER: NINTENDO DEVELOPER: HAL LABORATORY ORIGINAL RELEASE: JULY 26, 1999

Nintendo Sixty-FORE!!!
MARIO GOLF

IS IT BORING to play as Mario? Do his ubiquity and popularity make him a dull choice when racing, smashing or partying? Mario Golf bucks the trend of Mario spin-offs by holding back the portly plumber, making him one of the last characters you unlock! I don't know if I'm alone in this, but that always made me really eager to play as the big guy here . . . even if I never use him in Smash Bros.!

Getting Nintendo's headliner on your roster takes some doing, as this N64 classic packs plenty of challenge into its six 18-hole courses to unlock and conquer. While it's *technically* the first Mario Golf game in the series, it's essentially a follow-up to Golf on the NES and its sequel, NES Open Tournament Golf. Like those games, it's got a splash of mushroom flavor and relies on a three-click swing mechanic to bring arcade-like fun into a sport that can sometimes be perceived as a bit stuffy.

The fun goes further in this N64 game in particular, as it's the only entry in the series to feature miniature golf (in two extra courses, no less) alongside lots of extra modes (like the excellent Ring Shot) and characters to unlock. Unfortunately, this doesn't extend to the four golfers originally available by linking the Game Boy Color Mario Golf to its console brother via Transfer Pak. While there are still plenty of things to do, it's a minor disappointment that not all the content is accessible on NSO. (Though maybe there's hope now that Game Boy has its own NSO app? GBC Mario Golf could be added in the future; then transfers might happen?)

That omission aside, the NSO version of this title plays pretty well. The bump in visual fidelity is very welcome after sinking hours into the game on my N64 (hooked up to an HDTV . . . the shame!) and the usual quality-of-life features such as portable play and saving anywhere are welcome. That said, it feels like the timing is just a little bit off when taking shots, even in Handheld Mode. I'm not sure if this is a problem with the NSO port or just baked into the game itself, but it doesn't feel as accurate as later Mario Golf entries.

All in all, while it might not be the absolute best in the series, Mario Golf is very much worth checking out on the Switch. If you're skilled enough, you may even unlock the big man himself! **— MATTHEW T.**

8.5

N64 NSO PUBLISHER: NINTENDO DEVELOPER: CAMELOT ORIGINAL RELEASE: JULY 30, 1999

The Stealthiest Selection
WINBACK: COVERT OPERATIONS

I'VE SAID IT before, but one of the things I love about Nintendo's curation of games in the Switch Online apps is that it gives players a chance to experience unique, quirky and even groundbreaking titles that they otherwise never would have tried. I mean, let's be real here: How many of you out there would have willingly purchased WinBack: Covert Operations as a standalone download if the Switch were still using the old Virtual Console method of presenting classic games? I could probably count its potential customers on one hand. But any NSO subscribers who've invested in access to the Expansion Pack in order to play other, bigger-name N64 games like GoldenEye or Banjo-Kazooie or Ocarina of Time now also have access to this game too. So why not give it a spin? It won't cost you any extra to try!

Now that may have made WinBack sound wimpy, but it's anything but! I'm hoping more people give it a chance because it's a genuinely interesting and undeniably influential game that far too many players missed the first time around.

WinBack is the original "stop and pop" shooter. Before this game, first- and third-person shooters were all about all-out, gun-blazing rushes right into the middle of frantic firefights. But Omega Force (ironically the same dev team that would go on to be known almost entirely for the Warriors games, which are all about dashing headfirst into overwhelming battles) here crafted a careful, cautious shooter that's focused on approaching each encounter with enemies slowly — and always taking cover.

You move your player character, a soldier and spy cut from the same cloth as Solid Snake, through his missions methodically. When you see a potential threat, you place his back flat against the nearest wall or crate or other convenient hiding spot. Then you trigger the game's weapon lock, pop out from behind your cover position, send some bullets sailing toward the foe and quickly return to safety, back again with your back on the wall.

This rhythm has become the foundation of so many shooters since the N64 era came to an end — the Gears of Wars franchise in particular owes a ton to WinBack — and it's fun to get to see and play the origin point of such a major gameplay mechanic. WinBack's story is gonzo bananas, too, so you might want to give it more than a few minutes! **— LUCAS**

7.5

N64 NSO PUBLISHER: KOEI TECMO DEVELOPER: OMEGA FORCE ORIGINAL RELEASE: OCTOBER 20, 1999

A Classic Costume Party
MARIO PARTY 2

I HAVEN'T GIVEN up hope for Mario Party 2.

Though my family's already sworn off Mario Party 1 for good (go back two pages for that story), I might still have a shot at convincing them to give its sequel an honest try. They already brushed off my first suggestion to play this one, but I feel like I just need to explain how it's superior to its immediate predecessor, and then they'll come right around.

Right?

For starters, Mario Party 2 banished all stick-spinning minigames from the series. Players seriously had injured themselves from placing their palms on top of the plastic joystick and rotating it around far too quickly for far too long (when the developers' intent was much more gentle movements using their thumbs). MP2 eliminated the possibility of a repeat of that incident by simply axing that kind of minigame design entirely.

Next, the characters in Mario Party 2 were made extra charming since this sequel suited them all up in costumes! And there were several, each matching the theme of the chosen game board: If you were playing a party in Space Land, everyone became astronauts; if you instead selected Western Land, everybody dressed up like cowboys. And so on! It was a great idea to turn every Mario Party into a costume party, and it's sadly one that has never been revisited in newer sequels since!

An extra level of strategy swept into the series with the addition of items to the gameplay: You could now collect and hold on to such helpful luck-boosting baubles as Mushrooms that added to your dice rolls, Warp Blocks that swapped your position with an opponent's and the powerful Magic Lamp, which summoned a genie to carry you straight to the Star Space.

And there were better minigames in this one too, like all-time classic Grab Bag, the famously frustrating (yet still fun) Slot Car Derby and board-specific games like Quick Draw Corks (which would only be in the rotation to appear while playing in Western Land).

Now doesn't all that sound enticing? Wouldn't *you* want to play Mario Party 2 with your own kids (or your parents)? No? OK, how about this: Carter and Calvin, I'll give you bonus game time if you say yes! — **LUCAS**

8.5

N64 NSO PUBLISHER: NINTENDO DEVELOPER: HUDSON SOFT ORIGINAL RELEASE: JANUARY 24, 2000

Creative Combinations
KIRBY 64: THE CRYSTAL SHARDS

WE'RE JUST ABOUT to hit the one-year anniversary of Kirby and the Forgotten Land, a game that proved the Pink Puffball still has plenty of innovative ideas left to explore even after 30 years of adventuring. Why not celebrate by turning back the clock and playing this earlier Kirby quest – which was nearly as trailblazing for its time!

Kirby 64: The Crystal Shards was the first 3D Kirby game. But that's 3D in the polygonal sense, not the world design one: This game still kept the action locked to a sidescrolling perspective even as it moved past 2D sprites to render our hero, his enemies and his allies with actual depth for the first time ever. Uniquely, though, the camera didn't stick to a strict side-on view all the time – though Kirby only ever moves along one axis in this adventure, the viewpoint is sometimes tilted to make some rooms feel more cinematic than others.

That's the storytelling emphasis of this sequel shining through! This isn't just another video game – rather, it's a charming tale about Kirby and his friends that just so happens to be told through the medium of a video game. It's all about Kirby seeking out the scattered subtitular Crystal Shards, helping out his new friend, a fairy named Ribbon who's fled from a world that's been besieged by Kirby's old enemy, Dark Matter.

Ribbon tags along for the quest and shows up to safely stow any Shards that Kirby comes across, but she's not the only party member! Waddle Dee (who'd probably be Bandana Dee is this game were remade today), the artist Adeleine and even King Dedede himself all pop in to help our hero at various points. You even get to *be* Dedede! (Kirby rides on his back.)

The biggest highlight of this specific sequel, though, is its inventive Copy Ability combinations. Kirby can mix and match pairs of his famous powers, fusing them to make new joint abilities! For example, mixing Fire with Cutter gives him a huge burning sword to wield. Doubling up with two Stone powers turns him into a massive, shambling rock golem. But the best has to be combining Ice with Spark: That combo shapeshifts Kirby into a refrigerator, which spawns health-restoring food!

The whole game is generous with health items and 1-Ups, in fact, so it's a fairly easy jaunt that should be playable by even the youngest Kirby fans. If you have one of those in your home, pass 'em the controller! — **LUCAS**

9.0

N64 NSO PUBLISHER: NINTENDO DEVELOPER: HAL LABORATORY ORIGINAL RELEASE: JUNE 26, 2000

Now with Online Matches!
MARIO TENNIS

ONE ASPECT OF playing Nintendo 64 games through Nintendo Switch Online that I want to be sure to clearly touch on is that every game with a multiplayer mode can now be enjoyed as an online experience! Whereas once the two-, three- and four-player party games made to take advantage of the N64's four built-in controller ports all demanded you and your guests all be gathered in the same room, now you could potentially play, say, Mario Tennis here, with friends spread all around the United States. Even the world! (I haven't checked that specifically, but I match up with Japanese Splatoon players all the time, so I assume it'd function just fine.)

Mario Tennis might very well be the game you want to use to test the online connectivity for yourself, too, since this was one of the greatest multiplayer experiences the good ol' N64 had to offer. There was just something addictive about the simplicity Camelot achieved in adapting the game of tennis here. You could have a ton of fun just playing the game at its most basic level – moving your character around the court with the control stick and using just one button to return the ball when it bounced your way – but you could also go deeper with more advanced techniques, specific shot selections and characters with special attributes.

Speaking of characters, I contractually must always mention that this is the game that introduced Waluigi for the first time ever, and it must be appropriately honored for having done so. But did you know it also brought both Birdo and Daisy back into the Mario series' spotlight? Before this game's release, both of those characters had slipped into obscurity: Daisy hadn't been seen for nearly a decade, and Birdo's most recent appearance was her brief cameo in Super Mario RPG, over four years earlier. They were both reintroduced and had their status as regular roster members of Mario sports and kart games solidified here.

The overall roster in Mario Tennis is good, but not currently complete – there are a few characters in this game who were originally unlockable by using the N64 Transfer Pak to connect the Game Boy Color version of this same game. So, like Mario Golf and the Pokémon Stadium games, I'm hoping that functionality makes a comeback by way of the Game Boy NSO app. We might find out soon! Pokémon Day is February 27! **– LUCAS**

8.0

N64 NSO PUBLISHER: NINTENDO DEVELOPER: CAMELOT ORIGINAL RELEASE: AUGUST 28, 2000

A Twist on Tetris Attack
POKÉMON PUZZLE LEAGUE

THE POKÉMON COMPANY likes to keep its massive media empire carefully divided. There are the Pokémon video games, which we concern ourselves with the most (given that we're a video game magazine), but then there are the toys, the trading cards, the TV shows and movies and all manner of other kinds of merchandise . . . it's a whole big tree with a ton of separate branches, and they don't really overlap all that often.

Which is why, over 27 years after the series began, there have still only been a handful of video games that directly acknowledge the Pokémon anime. And the N64 got two of them! Snap was the first, with Professor Oak greetings players with the same smile and voice they'd seen in the show – and Puzzle League came next, overflowing with all the other cast members of the cartoon series.

But it's all just window dressing! Though Ash Ketchum is here along with Team Rocket, Brock, Misty and all the rest of the iconic characters of the anime's early years, they really have nothing to do with the gameplay. Because Pokémon Puzzle League is just another reskinning of Panel de Pon! This tile-matching puzzle series was first sold in Japan with a fairy theme, then got renamed to "Tetris Attack" for its American SNES debut (which also swapped all the fairies for Yoshi's Island characters). This is a game series that's struggled with its visual identity from the start.

Luckily, no matter which characters are pushed into it or what brand name's slapped on the box, the core gameplay design of Panel de Pon is always a winner. You control a cursor that highlights two tiles at a time, and it's your job to swap the positions of the tiles repeatedly and quickly in order to line up three or more of the same type. Doing so clears that set out of the playing field, and if you're playing in a versus mode, big chains and combos also send garbage blocks sailing over to the opponent's side, threatening to knock them out if they don't respond fast enough.

The big innovation Pokémon Puzzle League added was a new 3D mode with a cylindrical tower packed with tiles all around its circumference! I've had fun revisiting that mode the most through the NSO re-release – though it's nice to have the normal 2D Panel de Pon here too, since Tetris Attack hasn't yet joined the SNES NSO lineup. (And might never, at this point.) Give it a spin yourself, and enjoy seeing old-school Ash! **– LUCAS**

8.0

N64 NSO PUBLISHER: NINTENDO DEVELOPER: NINTENDO SOFTWARE TECHNOLOGY ORIGINAL RELEASE: SEPTEMBER 25, 2000

Meet with a Terrible Fate
THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: MAJORA'S MASK

CAN YOU REMEMBER the moment your childhood ended? If you're a child reading that question, you may be thinking, "No, but I can't wait for that day to come! Then I can do anything I want!" If you're a grown-up reading it, you probably know better. Adults have more power than kids, but they have more responsibilities to match. The freedom to do whatever you like with your time . . . balanced against the stress of trying use that time wisely, lest you be wracked with guilt and regret. It's a hallmark of adulthood. It's also the defining psychological conflict at the heart of Majora's Mask.

It begins with the end of innocence for both its protagonist and antagonist. Infected by the corrupting power of the titular Majora's Mask, the once-childlike Skull Kid opens the game by transforming into a hateful creature, setting off a chain of events that lead the moon to collide with Termina (the aptly named nation where the game takes place). Link dons a mask early on as well, which makes him scream, stretch and contort until he becomes a Deku Scrub (a minor monster from Ocarina of Time). Going through these changes is the only way he can gain the powers he needs to explore other cultures, unite the powers of the world and save Termina from annihilation – before time runs out!

Though it stars Young Link, Majora's Mask is still one of the most mature games in the Zelda series, to the point where it may be too scary for children. That's even more true in the N64 original. While the 3DS remake featured more realistic graphics, the toy-like look and creepy-candy colors of this version are a better fit for its underlying themes. Seeing this simple, angular world, set up like a giant action figure playset, being gradually poisoned by problems that only adults should ever have to cope with, just hits home harder. And the painful pseudo puberty that Link goes through every time he turns into one of Termina's different fictional races is a perfect analogy for the growing pains that 3D gaming went through back in the 64-bit era.

So Majora's Mask is a heavy experience, but it remains a masterpiece and is highly recommended (for adults). **– JONATHAN**

9.0

N64 NSO | PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: NINTENDO
ORIGINAL RELEASE: OCTOBER 26, 2000

A Sensational Shooter
SIN & PUNISHMENT

SIN & PUNISHMENT is an unforgettable masterclass from legendary studio Treasure that somehow never made its way to American shores. Well, that it is until it got a surprise release on the Wii Virtual Console in 2007, and once more on the Nintendo Switch Online app as a launch title.

Set in the far-off dystopian future of 2007 (yeah, we know), players take control of two young rebels fighting against genetically modified critters called Ruffians and an oppressive military in high-octane on-rails shooter action. And when I say high-octane, I mean it – the game runs at an unbelievable 60fps as the screen fills with enemies and vistas blasting by at high speeds.

So much of Treasure's trademark refined shmup action and challenge is in full force here, as also seen in titles like Gunstar Heroes and Ikaruga. As the studio's first true 3D game, a rather . . . *experimental* approach was taken to the controls. The game was originally designed to be played using the two left prongs of the N64 controller, and when played on original hardware, it really locks into place once the nuances of the game shine through.

There is a bit a learning curve considering the controls were built around a fairly non-standard controller, but once you get it down, it starts to feel alarmingly modern. Sin & Punishment remains as one of the most engrossing N64 games to this day, with combo-focused action that evokes moods of even modern shooters of current day. Add onto that memorable boss fights and a beautifully incoherent anime plot (it's worth looking up a full breakdown after playing) and quite frankly, I walked away from my time with this one on NSO with what earnestly might be my new favorite N64 game!

Since there is currently no other way to legally buy and play this classic in the United States, there's a strong argument that Sin & Punishment may be the game that justifies NSO's price of admission. The short-lived Wii sequel, Sin & Punishment: Star Successor, is sadly one of the last titles to come from Treasure as of late, but the studio has teased that they're working on something "highly requested." Perhaps it could it be a return to this cult-classic franchise? **– JOHN-CHARLES**

9.5

N64 NSO | PUBLISHER: NINTENDO
DEVELOPERS: NINTENDO & TREASURE
ORIGINAL RELEASE: NOVEMBER 21, 2000 (IN JAPAN)

A Storybook Adventure

PAPER MARIO

EVERYONE WHO PLAYED and liked Super Mario RPG would have loved a direct sequel. And one was planned! There was a lot of hype for it . . . before Square essentially left Nintendo for Sony's PlayStation and its larger capacity discs, turning down the project. That led Nintendo to turn to Intelligent Systems to develop Mario Story – or, as it's known everywhere outside Japan, Paper Mario.

The original title in what is now a successful (if somewhat controversial) series, Paper Mario started as an RPG experience meant for younger audiences. Simple mechanics, intuitive gameplay and an emphasis on character and story led the game to become very popular and unique in its field. Puzzles are easy, but exploring is fun. Timed button presses to enhance attacks and defense (carried over from Super Mario RPG) made battles more engaging, and several other RPGs in subsequent years took note.

The gameplay balance is perfect for more casual play. Even when Mario's low health and defense get tricky when several enemies gang up on him, there always seems to be an item, a Star Power or some other trick to use to escape the danger.

Paper Mario has maintained its popularity for decades, and another reason why is its introduction of popular companion characters! New allies steadily join him throughout the adventure, from Bombette the rebellious pink Bob-omb to Parakarry, the mail-carrying Paratroopa. This implausible bunch made you think differently about Mario's enemies, expanded the lore and made for a great story.

Playing this classic on the Switch is easy due to smart button mapping that's explained in the suspend menu. I didn't even really have to think about it, outside of swapping party members on the field, which is done with the right stick. Some seams and graphical age spots are more obvious on HD screens, but it still works because it's part of the charm of Paper Mario's world. In fact, out of all the titles available in the N64 app, it may have aged the best! The game's pace feels much slower compared to today's RPGs, but that may be a feature for some.

In an age where accessibility to older titles is concerning, it's nice to have this one on the go. Many wish that later Paper Marios followed this one more closely in mechanics and characterizations. It's easy to see why! **— BRETT**

9.5

N64 NSO
PUBLISHER: NINTENDO
DEVELOPER: INTELLIGENT SYSTEMS
ORIGINAL RELEASE: FEBRUARY 5, 2001

A Prescription for Fun!

DR. MARIO 64

I STILL REMEMBER where I was the moment Dr. Mario 64 was announced. It was my sophomore year in college, and I was doing my daily check of the latest Nintendo headlines over on IGN. One day, with no warning whatsoever, a news story appeared declaring that the Dr. Mario series would be getting an all-new N64 sequel!

I was over the moon. I called my Dad excitedly to share the good news, since he and I had been playing two-player versus matches against each other in Dr. Mario for years – first on the original NES cartridge, then over on the SNES through Tetris & Dr. Mario. I remember being shocked to see the series continue onto another of Nintendo's consoles – mostly because of the timing of its release. The first half of 2001 was the final stretch for the system – almost all of Nintendo's attention had shifted to the *two* brand-new platforms they were planning to launch later that same year: the Game Boy Advance and the GameCube. I then figured that Dr. Mario was called back into action because it was an existing game design and it could probably be ported over pretty quickly and easily.

And yet Dr. Mario 64 is no mere port! With every reason in the world to phone in as simple a sequel as possible, Nintendo instead fully packed this game with features.

Its biggest addition is a story mode, which lets you play as either the good doctor himself or his rotten rival Wario, taking on a series of ever-more-challenging AI opponents. You can also fight the foe of your choice in Vs. Computer mode, dig through Viruses to eliminate three specific targets in Flash mode and go for points in three-minute Score Attacks.

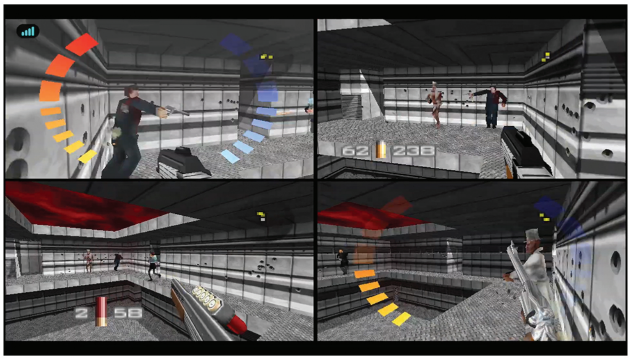
All of those options are great, but have taken a backseat over the years to my continued two-player matches against my Dad. We still have our original cartridge set up at my parents' house, and its battery save is still going, keeping a chronicle of the wins and losses of our decades-long rivalry! I doubt that Nintendo will keep the Switch Online service active for long enough to match that, but I may still try to teach Carter and Calvin the ropes of this great puzzler using this newest version.

You should give it a try too! Dr. Mario, in all its many forms, is a great match-three puzzle game that rewards both reflexes and planning. If you can outsmart or outrun your opponent (or both!), you'll be well on your way to victory!

Hey Dad! Ready to play again? **— LUCAS**

9.5

N64 NSO
PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: NINTENDO
ORIGINAL RELEASE: APRIL 8, 2001



Bond is Better Than Ever

GOLDENEYE 007

WE'VE SAVED THE best for last.

While just about every game that gets added to the Nintendo 64 lineup of Nintendo Switch Online ends up looking better than ever before, the incredible forward thinking of the developers at Rare in the '90s set this one up for even greater success. GoldenEye 007 was programmed with native 16:9 widescreen support all the way back in 1997, when hardly anyone actually had a TV that would accommodate that option. Over a quarter of a century later, though, it has since become the standard – so this is the one N64 NSO game that was already ready for your fancy HD set over 25 years ago! And it looks absolutely fantastic, especially since playing it in widescreen banishes the normally unturnoffable NSO borders!

The extreme increase in visual clarity ends up positively affecting the gameplay, too. I've always been a fan of using sniper rifles in shooters, as it feels satisfying to be able to zap a target from a position of safety all the way on the other side of the map – and now it's even better, as with the enhanced resolution and lesser overall N64 murkiness of the view, I can line up headshots that I never would've been able to pull off on my old 4:3 CRT in '97.

Though the actual "lining up" part is still pretty clunky. Though the devs *were* forward thinking, they were still held back by the constraints of the N64 controller back in the day, so play control is not an element that magically feels better from the start here on NSO. In fact, the default control scheme, using either a Pro Controller or Joy-Cons, is kind of a mess!

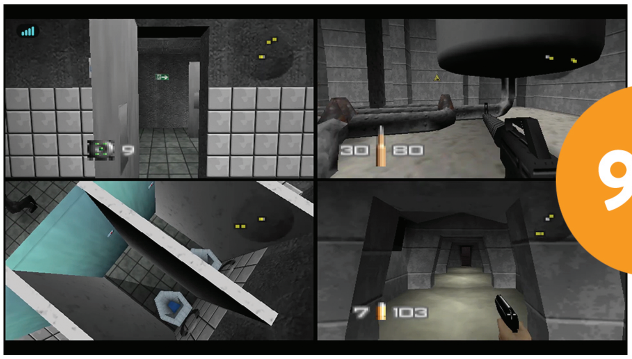
Thankfully the Switch offers a button remapping feature at the hardware level, and combined with the in-game alternate control styles Rare built in originally, you can cobble together a way to play that feels nearly as good as a modern shooter. Once I took the time to jump through those hoops, my enjoyment of this new re-release increased immensely. (Details on Page 54!)

So GoldenEye looks great and it can been coerced into controlling well too – but is the actual game still fun to run through? For someone like me who first took command of Commander Bond when it was first released on the N64, it's definitely a nostalgic good time. For anyone who is a bit younger, it will feel much more limited.

Bond's brand of international espionage in this game almost always boils down to simple fire-fights with nameless soldiers – run into a room, mow everyone down, then run into the next room and repeat. There's not a lot of nuance to 007's spycraft.

Though that only works to benefit the game's famous multiplayer mode! Running around wildly slinging bullets (or just throwing hands) at friends is as hilarious as ever. And the game running through Nintendo Switch Online's emulator improves it again, since multiplayer can now happen online! If you can manage to coordinate with three friends who all also have access to the N64 lineup by being Expansion Pack-tier NSO subscribers, you too can relive the golden years (literally) of the Nintendo 64! **– LUCAS**

N64 NSO
PUBLISHER: NINTENDO
DEVELOPER: RARE
ORIGINAL RELEASE: AUGUST 25, 1997



9.5

A Rodent on the Rooftops

THE SPIRIT AND THE MOUSE

IF NOT FOR the accidental intervention of a spirit guardian named Lumion, Lila the mouse would be a lightning-fried rodent carcass in the alleyways of Sainte-et-Claire. A healthy dose of luck and a drive to help humans saved her life when she was chosen and imbued with the spirit's powers of electricity. Lumion cannot escape the lightning rod that connected the two, and only happiness derived from fixing human's problems can give him enough power to return to "the Maker."

Much to Lumion's dismay, Lila must carry out his work of helping the humans after the lightning storm wreaks havoc on the electrical grid of the small village. The work is accomplished by identifying a human need – like trying to get a TV, computer or other device working. Next, Lila must find the Kibblin box that is supposed to house the little electric sprites called Kibblins, and then find the Kibblins . . . who all need a little more direction than one would think an entity with just one job would. After helping the Kibblins with their various conundrums, the grid is restored and happiness is received! Rinse and repeat.

What makes The Spirit and the Mouse special is the personalities of the goofy Kibblins, solving their unique problems and the ensuing reward of feeling you made a difference despite your diminutiveness. It also has all the elements of a good collectathon. Players can find all 137 of the Blue Bulbs that were knocked loose from the fountain display during the storm. If enough are returned, unlocks like Bulb Radar and Photo Mode can be purchased using Sparks found by shocking metal objects all around town.

No harm can come to Lila – and I tested that out by falling from the highest point on the map! It seems that as a bonus to her borrowed power, she is invincible. This makes for a very relaxing, non-threatening experience with no time limits or other constraints. This is a good, short game to be enjoyed after something intense. It has a cute plot, a satisfying end and plenty of entertaining characters.

The real antagonist of the game is the camera, which reminded me of GameCube-era woes where readjustments were often necessary and the game magically seemed to always pick the perfectly wrong angle to deter your progress. Luckily there are no difficult platforming sections, but occasionally just trying to see how you were supposed to get somewhere was frustrating due to the camera's unwillingness to cooperate – and tight spaces seem to really compound the issue. While I think the game was intentionally trying to confine the camera's movements to make certain Bulbs and pathways harder to see, the fact it happens in more open places made it seem less purposeful and more problematic.

Developer Alblune and publisher Armor Games Studios are asking $20 for the game, which is a stretch considering its four-to-five hour runtime and simplistic gameplay. Personally I would wait for a sale to enjoy this bite-sized morsel! **– BRETT**

7.5

SWITCH PUBLISHER: ARMOR GAMES STUDIOS DEVELOPER: ALBLUNE RATING: T

The Girls are Back in Town

RIVER CITY GIRLS 2

MISAKO AND KYOKO, the original River City Girls, broke into the beat-'em-up scene hard back in 2019. Much like the game they starred in, these two small teenage street toughs packed a massive punch, unable to contain their absurd enthusiasm for joyful violence. Underdogs from the get-go, they took an over-the-top approach at every turn, over-delivering on almost every front while defying expectations at a regular pace.

For this sequel, expectations are a lot higher, and the girls do their best to scale up in kind with more playable characters, more enemies and a much larger version of River City to explore. This time Misako, Kyoko and their boyfriends (who were both unlockable New Game+ characters in the first game) are joined by two new friends: Marian, the punching-bag-turned-body-builder from the Double Dragon series, and Provie, the breakdance fighter from the PC-exclusive River City Ransom Underground. The former is big and bold; the latter is stylish and savvy. That makes them both perfect emblems for what this follow-up is trying to do! It's a much bigger, more boldly flavorful adventure. Unfortunately, it sometimes collapses under the weight of its own ambition, reaching for moves that it can't quite pull off.

In short, the highs in River City Girls 2 are much higher than the original's, while its weak points are sadly easier to spot. The whole first stage feels like a slightly worse continuation of the end of the first title. After a short tutorial that teaches you stuff like how to wall jump (which is a slightly unnecessary lesson for a game that's mostly about punching and kicking), there's a fun story reason why the girls end up unlearning all the moves they learned by the end of their last game. Then it all reboots at Kyoko's house, which works as your home base for the rest of the adventure.

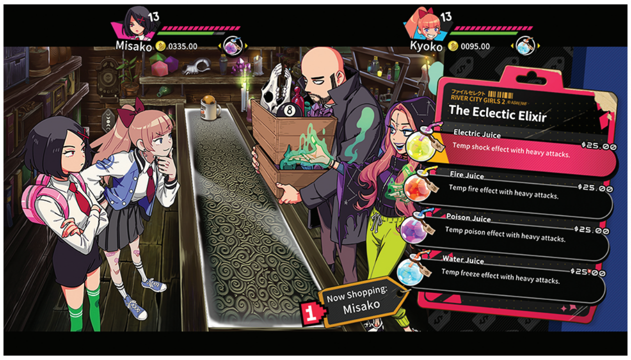
That's when the cracks begin to show.

Admittedly, there's a lot going on in River City Girls 2, with larger areas and more enemies on-screen than in 1, but the game can't always keep up. Slowdown, framerate drops and screen freezes were much more common in my two-player multiplayer sessions with RCG2 than RCG1. Maybe it's unfair to compare the two games, but it's hard not to in the first level in particular, where all the playable characters and most of the enemies are carryovers from the original game.

After that, River City Girls 2 opens up and proves itself to be unquestionably bigger and brighter than its predecessor. First off, it becomes non-linear, allowing you to choose which areas to explore and fight through next. You'll also battle the aforementioned Marian and Provie as bosses before they become playable. They're River City Girls too, using similar launchers and juggles as Kyoko and Misako, with Marian focusing on grabs and slams, and Provie using flashy, nimble combos.

The new parts of the city that additional crew members open up are really something else. Marian opens up a haunted forest stage that has its own lost woods, inhabited by magic-lobbing amateur wizards and creepy-but-lovable cymbal-clanging zombies, culminating in a mind-bending boss battle against a sympathetic gothic witch. You even end up stumbling into the cabin from Evil Dead at one point! It's inspired.

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: WAYFORWARD RATING: E10+



Unlocking Provie lets you to jump to the headquarters of Technōs, the developer of many games in the River City/Double Dragon universe. It's packed with seamless throwbacks to '80s and '90s gaming, ranging from nostalgic charmers like NES Double Dragon to more obscure titles like The Combatribes, and even totally unrelated cult favorites like Space Maria. In fact, the whole game is packed with these kinds of heartfelt cameos. Jake from WayForward's horror/puzzle title Lit; Sonny Lee, the forgotten Lee brother from Double Dragon 3; Kebako from Cat Girl Without Salad; two icons from the Guilty Gear series; the original sprites of Alex and Ryan from River City Ransom. These and tons of other famous (and not so famous) faces all make appearances, mostly as assists who can jump in and attack for a quick second. Finding them all, and all the other secrets, is no small task.

There are also A LOT more silly sidequests to take on, like a weight-lifting competition, a clue-hunting mystery, a race across the map against Crash (from Crash 'N The Boys: Street Challenge), a cat hunt, a selfie competition and so on.

The extra time spent exploring the city for these extras leads to some balance issues — it's easy to grind and over-level without thinking about it. In my initial playthrough, where I switched between Provie and Marian for the bulk of my battles, I ended up way too strong after that Technōs stage. As a result, the last three or so areas were easy to the point of being vaguely anticlimactic.

Of course, I could have replayed it all at a higher difficulty level, or challenged myself to learn new combos and techniques just for the heck of it — but with no extra boss or further playable characters to unlock like in the first game, I wasn't super motivated to go back for more after the credits rolled.

Because of some performance issues, like more frequent, longer-lasting load times, and the kinds of balance problems that are commonplace with open-world games with tons of secrets to find and abilities to unlock, River City Girls 2 didn't end up being better than the first in each and every way. But it's still a must-buy for fans of fantastic 2D animation and silly-but-brutal beat-'em-ups. All the new content is fantastic (including the soundtrack by Megan McDuffie and Mega Ran) while still feeling consistent with everything that made the original great.

If you're unsure if you want to take the plunge, the less expensive prequel is a great way to test the waters. If you get through it and end up hungry for a much bigger burg to brawl in, and can stomach a few technical hiccups, you'll more than get your money's worth with this full-throated, knuckle-dusting follow-up. **— JONATHAN**

8.5

32 Bits are All it Needs

LUNISTICE

WHEN NINTENDO JUMPED from the Super NES' 16 bits straight to the N64's, well, 64, Big N loyalists didn't get to experience the 32-bit style of gaming that existed briefly between the two. The Sega Saturn and Sony's first PlayStation had a unique vibe in their early 3D games, and Lunistice tries to recapture that lost look for a brand-new adventure.

It succeeds spectacularly. Though I personally spent little time playing non-Nintendo video games throughout the mid-'90s, the low-res look of Lunistice still manages to bring forth a wonderful feeling of nostalgia for that era. Its characters and environments are built out of an intentionally low number of polygons, and its texture work is perfectly limited too. But everything's seen in HD clarity!

This is probably the best-looking homage to that age I've ever seen – but the truly great thing about the game is that how it plays matches how it looks!

Lunistice is a fast-paced 3D platformer that reminds me most of some of Sonic the Hedgehog's trips into the third dimension – but, if I may be so bold, I feel like it handles better than many of Sega's adventures. The racing animal hero here is a tanuki named Hana, and she moves with a sense of momentum that feels expertly crafted. She can't stop or turn on a dime – rather, her forward velocity causes her to have to lean into curves, and you'll often have to manage her speed to make sure she isn't going *too* fast. A dedicated button, when held, causes her to cut her speed down when you need a greater degree of control, for things like precise platforming sequences. Lots of games have a run button! Lunistice has an anti-run button, and it's kind of brilliant.

Platformers are built around both running and jumping, of course, and the jumping side of the equation is just as compelling. Hana has access to both a single jump and a mid-air double jump by default, and using both of them will see you safely through the majority of the game's high-octane environments. When you need just a bit of extra distance, though, she can swirl her tanuki tail around in a circle for what is effectively a third jump. That gives you just a touch of extra control and course correction at the end of long leaps, to help ensure that you land safely just where you meant to.

And if you miss? No huge deal. Lunistice is generous with checkpoints, so falling into the endless abyss below the hovering platforms only ever means a setback of a few seconds most of the time. This game wants you to keep your speed up so you get into that coveted flow state – I imagine that speedrunners are already thoroughly addicted to it!

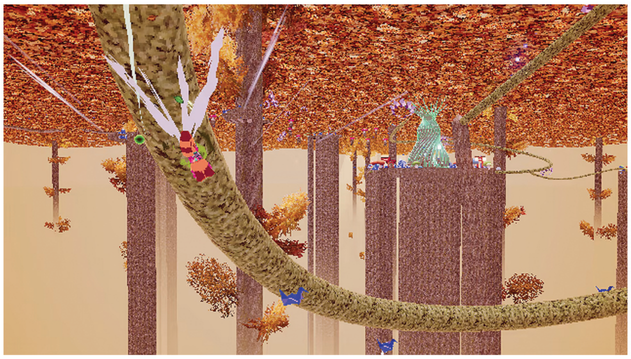
Lunistice is not too long, as it speeds by with just half a dozen worlds containing only two levels each. But it's also not too expensive – investing in this adventure will only take you $4.99! It's an incredible value even if you were to zip through the whole thing in the span of a single weekend.

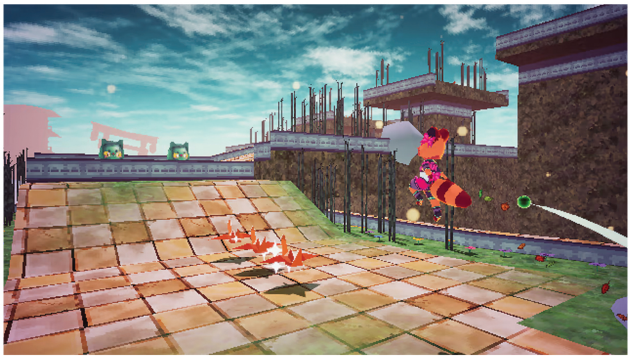
There's replay value in it, too, as each level is filled with collectable origami cranes – you can try to grab them all for 100% completion – and you also earn higher grades on levels if you manage to finish them without taking any deaths. And even more than that, there are two hidden unlockable characters that remix the playstyle!

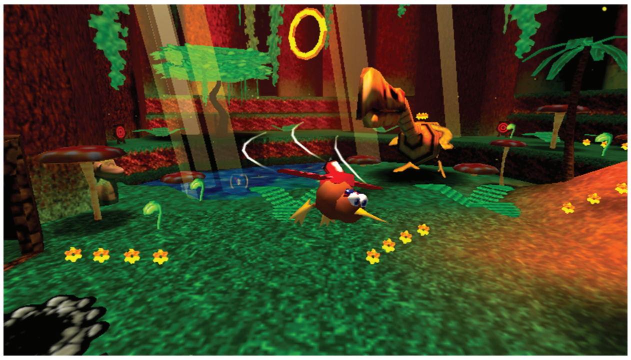
Lunistice offers an awful lot of excellence for an awfully low price. Pay that $4.99 and enjoy! **– LUCAS**

9.5

SWITCH PUBLISHER: DECK13
DEVELOPER: A GRUMPY FOX
RATING: E







A Love Letter to a Bear and a Bird

SUPER KIWI 64

IF YOU SOMEHOW sail through the entire selection of old N64 titles available through Nintendo Switch Online and find yourself still craving more adventures in that same style, I'm pleased to report there's one brand-new one that's just recently been made available! Super Kiwi 64 just landed in the Switch eShop this past December, and from there it quickly flew into my personal library of digital games.

I pulled the trigger on a purchase of this one quickly primarily based on its price: a measly $2.99! (Even lower than Lunistice!) I figured that, at a price as low as that, I could feel perfectly justified in buying it and going in blind even if it turned out to be total garbage. Luckily, it didn't!

Super Kiwi 64 is a 3D platformer that, true to its name, looks and plays exactly like the games we got on the real Nintendo 64 back in the late '90s. Its characters and environments are all built out of only a handful of polygons; its textures are intentionally muddy and low-res. Its camera control and just the general feel of its gameplay are a couple of decades behind the times. In other words, it does what it set out to do!

You take command of a cutesy kiwi character who plays like a fusion of Kazooie and the Pokio birds that Mario could capture in Super Mario Odyssey — you can run fast, jump and freely glide through the air, and whenever you come across a wall you can poke your beak straight into it, then leap up, poke it again, and so on. So walls are no obstacle.

In fact, nothing else in this game is much of an obstacle either — each of its eight small open-world levels are easily explorable, with very few enemies to encounter or traps to trip you up. I think I only took damage one time while playing through the entire quest, and even then it was only because I jumped into a flame deliberately just to finally see what the damage-taking animation looked like.

That extreme level of unchallenge means Super Kiwi 64 could be a good game to get for young kids just learning to play 3D platformers — but a few other elements included here hold me back from making that recommendation. There are some weird visuals in the game's environments: skulls and skeletons aplenty, an area where three dead bodies are stuck in place by the spears that killed them, and a bunch of glowing orbs that seem to have pixelated human fetuses inside? What in the world is that all about?

The game is also super short, taking just an hour or two to fully complete. Again, at a price of $2.99 that low of a total playtime isn't worth complaining about — just know that you'll only be getting one afternoon's worth of enjoyment out of this one, rather than the whole childhood weekend or more you enjoyed with its inspiration, Banjo-Kazooie, back in the day. **— LUCAS**

7.0

SWITCH PUBLISHER: DIPLODOCUS GAMES DEVELOPER: SIACTRO RATING: E

Not Your Father's Atari Games

ATARI MANIA

SO YOU'VE PLAYED all of Atari 50 and you've come down with a case of Atari fever? You want to know even more about what Atari has to offer? Sounds like you're ready to try Atari Mania!

If you've ever played a WarioWare game, you'll know what to expect here. The majority of the gameplay centers around a series of micro-games that last a few seconds each. But what's special about this one is that they're almost all mashups of multiple Atari games! You'll have to defeat bugs from Millipede with a Pong paddle. You'll have to stop the missiles from Missile Command with the ship from Asteroids. Elements from all manner of games through-out Atari's history come into play, and while knowledge of their library isn't a requirement, you'll definitely pick up on fun details, like why they named the main character from Adventure "Warren," if you have a decent grasp on most things Atari.

It's not all microgames, though. Those segments are woven together by a pretty fun narrative and an overworld that involves tons of secrets to find and clever puzzles to solve. You play as the caretaker of an Atari museum where all of Atari's game characters exist as living entities who inhabit their various games for the amusement of the museum's patrons. It's your job to make sure everyone's on schedule, and to keep the place spick and span with your handy-dandy broom.

One day you come into work to find a series of dead pixels have invaded and are trying to suck everyone into a void of nothingness. What's more, the lovable Bentley Bear from Crystal Castles has been corrupted by these dead pixels and has sworn to "liberate" everyone from their gaming prisons! Running into a dead pixel initiates a series of title-specific microgames that culmi-nates in a boss battle. Again, similar to WarioWare, except with a distinct Atari flair.

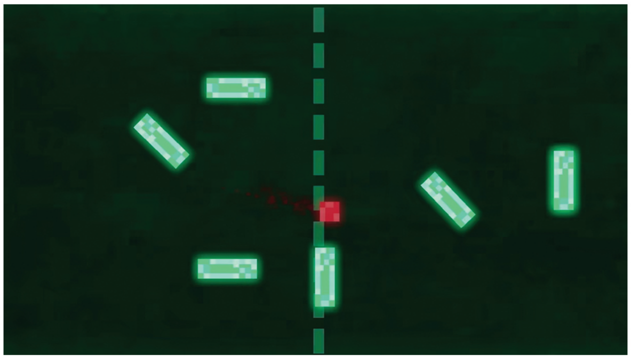
The process of unlocking all the secrets, like instruction manual scans hidden by adorable mice called Glitches, can get a bit tedious thanks to some repeating dialogue, and the same goes for the boss encounters. In fact, the whole game has an unfortunate level of jank to it. The movement is choppier than you want it to be, and sometimes the controls in the microgames aren't very sharp – especially any involving paddle movement like Video Olympics and Circus Atari. This lack of polish holds the game back for sure, but thank-fully its charm and personality more than make up for any technical shortcomings.

For every bit of frustration, there were plenty of moments that had me laughing out loud at just how clever the game can be. Like in WarioWare, sometimes it isn't immediately clear what the microgames want you to do, but when you finally figure it out there's that "aha!" moment that's oh so rewarding.

Atari Mania doesn't get every-thing right, but it's so full of heart and reverence for these ancient properties that it's really hard not to love. The visuals are an interesting mix of Atari 2600-style sprites and considerably more detailed takes on the original retro designs, and it really works. The characters are likable, the music rules and like the best of Golden Age video gaming, it's just plain fun. This love letter to Atari's history is not to be missed.
– KRIS

7.5

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: ATARI
RATING: E



BY MATTHEW TARANTO

PREVIEWS

THE SUPER MARIO BROS. MOVIE

Video gaming's most famous brothers are finally back on the big screen!

30 YEARS AGO, I was 11 years old. Also 30 years ago, Super Mario Bros.: The Movie was just about to open in theaters. It was perfect timing! I was at the perfect age to be able to enjoy Nintendo's first big theatrical film. And I did!

But Nintendo didn't.

Super Mario Bros.: The Movie has gone down in history as a famous box office flop. After debuting on May 28, 1993, it managed to pull in ticket sales of only $38,900,000 throughout its entire theatrical run. That looks like a large number, but it fell short of recouping the cost spent to make the movie in the first place – its production budget was reportedly somewhere around $45,000,000. So it lost money overall. It's like Nintendo paid millions of dollars to deliberately do damage to their own brand. Yikes!

Understandably, the Big N instantly fled from Hollywood and didn't look back. Any plans they might've had for another Mario movie or adaptations of any of their other video game brands evaporated, as they were scared off and worried that any second attempt would just produce the same result – or worse. Nintendo went back to focusing fully on making video games.

THE MINION MAN

At the same time that Mario Mario and Luigi Mario were Bob-ombing at the box office, another Mr. M was on the rise elsewhere in the moviemaking industry. Chris Meledandri had scored a hit with his own 1993 film, Disney's Cool Runnings, which got him put on a path to producing other funny, family-friendly films – a path that ultimately took him into the world of animation.

After stints at 20th Century Fox Animation and Blue Sky Studios that saw him overseeing the likes of the popular Ice Age series, Mr. Meledandri moved on to founding his own animation production studio, Illumination, in 2007. They were immediately successful. Their first film, Despicable Me, introduced the Minion characters that have gone on to be featured in four more movies, TV specials, short films and more (with another theatrical sequel set for next year). Illumination has also created the successful Sing and Secret Life of Pets franchises, did their own spin on the classic Christmas story of The Grinch and had an Easter-themed movie called Hop that was . . . well, not received too well by critics. But, critically, even that most poorly reviewed of their products made a ton of money. They've never had a flop.

MELEDANDRI MEETS MIYAMOTO

The fact that this new Mario movie is opening in theaters right after the Super Nintendo World theme park has finally opened its doors in America is no coincidence – the two projects are entirely intertwined! The park is a part of Universal Studios, and Universal is also part owner of Illumination. The crossover between companies meant that there was ample opportunity for Nintendo's chief creative visionary to cross paths with Illumination's, and sure enough Mr. Miyamoto met Mr. Meledandri and the two of them began to create ideas together.

The surefire success rate that the Illumination movies had achieved was enough to finally pull Nintendo back into the world of film production after decades away. Now we're days away from a new Super Mario Bros. movie!

MOVIE DISTRIBUTER: UNIVERSAL PICTURES PRODUCTION BY: UNIVERSAL PICTURES, ILLUMINATION & NINTENDO RELEASE DATE: APRIL 7, 2023 RATING: PG

GOING BACK TO BROOKLYN

So what should we expect to see in The Super Mario Bros. Movie? (Not Super Mario Bros.: The Movie. That will remain the 1993 film's slightly different name.) Well, get yourself ready for a Mario origin story that will bring the brothers all the way back to their humble beginnings in Brooklyn.

Honestly, for as much as Nintendo wants to distance this movie from the old live-action one, it looks like early scenes in this new adventure will largely mirror what my 11-year-old self first saw three decades ago. Mario and Luigi will be introduced as average joes working as plumbers in New York City, and somehow they'll find themselves stumbling through a magical portal/warp pipe and ending up in the Mushroom Kingdom.

That's where things will quickly deviate, though. In the old movie, the Mushroom Kingdom was presented as a grimy, run-down city overgrown with drooping bits of fungus – and already entirely under the command of King Koopa. (Everything went further south from there.) In the new movie, the Mushroom Kingdom will be the bright, cheerful land full of colorful Toads and floating bricks that we're used to seeing in the games. But it won't be the only kingdom we get to see! We're going globetrotting in this one!

KOOPA THE CONQUEROR

While we'll meet Mario and Luigi as they're knee-deep into plunging someone's clogged toilet, our introduction to Bowser will be a bit more menacing. He'll be on the warpath from the very beginning of the film, leading his clan of Koopas on a worldwide quest to claim kingship over every land there is. We know a poor kingdom of cutesy penguins will fall to his firebreathing might . . . and that he'll ultimately make his move against the Mushroom people. And what a move! New Movie Bowser is one-upping his video game counterpart by flying around not on a bunch of wooden airships, but rather a fearsome floating island fueled by volcanic rage! He's got a massive army at his command too, including at least one never-before-seen kind of Koopa!

ASSEMBLING A FIGHTING FORCE

Feel free to not read any further if you want to go in without any more early knowledge, but I think I've got the gist of the rest of the film figured out too.

. . . Still here? OK.

I'm pretty sure what we're going to get is a bit of a road trip adventure for Mario, Peach and Toad. Knowing that King Koopa is on his way to subdue all the other kingdoms beyond the little penguins' already fallen land, the trio of heroes will set out on a journey to reach those other lands first and rally the citizens there to the common cause of counterattacking the Koopas. We've seen a glimpse of Mario locked into an arena match against Donkey Kong – I give it a 98% likelihood that his strength is being tested by the Kongs to see if he's worthy of being accepted as an ally. And the scene in the screen up above? Hero training for Mario before the group leaves on the trip to begin with.

But what about Luigi? In a swerve to avoid the old "damsel in distress" trope, it won't be Peach who gets kidnapped by Bowser, but Luigi! Though I wouldn't put it past them to have Peach get nabbed in the final act – since it looks like Luigi will have freed himself by that point and set out on his own adventure, which will lead him into some spooky Luigi's Mansion-ish situations!

Finally, the Mario Kart content. That's gotta be all the allies heading out on the final attack, right? Maybe? Maybe not! Luckily we don't have to wait long to find out for sure. The new movie opens on April 7! **— LUCAS**

THE HERO HIMSELF
MARIO

Let's take a closer look at each of our six main characters, as well as talk about the voice actors who've been chosen to bring them to life on the big screen this time around. Mario is of course going to be our primary hero, as well as the eyes of the audience – since he'll be getting warped into the Mushroom Kingdom from the "real world" of New York, his wide-eyed awe at taking in things like massive mushrooms and gravity-defying blocks will be the way viewers are being encouraged to react too.

Chris Pratt's Mario voice has been the topic of a ton of debate, but the star power he's amassed from roles in major franchise films like Guardians of the Galaxy and Jurassic World make it understandable why he was selected.

CHRIS PRATT

HIS TRAUMATIZED TWIN
LUIGI

Charlie Day is not nearly as much of a household name as Pratt, as he's had a more limited filmography – his main claim to fame is his starring role in It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia, a sitcom that debuted in 2005 and is actually still going, making it the longest-running comedy of its kind, ever! In it, Charlie plays, well, "Charlie," a kind of moron with endless manic energy.

That sort of passionate screaming power should serve him well as Luigi, who looks like he'll be subjected to everything from mustache-plucking torture to abject fear while being chased down by hordes of undead Dry Bones. My prediction is that he'll escape those predicaments . . . but maybe not! Maybe he'll stay locked away until his brother saves the . . . Day!

CHARLIE DAY

POWERFUL PRINCESS
PEACH

Princess Peach Toadstool is finally going to make her American Mario movie debut – because she wasn't included in the old 1993 live-action movie! That film used Princess Daisy instead. Maybe because Daisy was an easier name for American audiences to understand? Peach wasn't yet known as Peach in the games back then – she was still just "Princess Toadstool" in the States. I can picture that movie somehow doing even worse in critical reception and ticket sales if its leading lady had been called Toadstool.

Anywho, the amazing Anya Taylor-Joy (The Queen's Gambit, Last Night in Soho) will ensure no one ignores her any more, especially since Movie Peach is being characterized as a fierce, capable warrior who never backs down from a fight!

ANYA TAYLOR-JOY

KINGDOM TOUR GUIDE
TOAD

Like many of our readers who wrote in to the Inbox section for this issue, I have a sneaking suspicion that Keegan-Michael Key will claim the largest portion of the audience's Mario movie memories with his performance as Toad. Key was one half of the iconic comedy duo Key & Peele – their Comedy Central sketch show was wild (and clips from it still earn millions of new views every day on YouTube). He's also starred in tons of films, including lending his voice to Toy Story 4, The Lion King remake and many, many more.

With Toad, he may have found the perfect role to really let loose! He'll likely be a constant source of comic relief as he accompanies Mario as a guide throughout his quest, and I wouldn't be surprised if they let him ad-lib a bunch of jokes either!

KEEGAN-MICHAEL KEY

ARENA OPPONENT
DONKEY KONG

Here's our "They're setting up a spin-off movie starring this character" character. I'd bet money on it! (Or at least a few bananas.)

Donkey Kong is going to have a supporting role here in The Super Mario Bros. Movie, as we know he'll beat the snot out of Mario in a one-on-one battle before ultimately befriending him. That's going to mean we'll miss out on a direct adaptation of their original video game battle (when D.K. kidnapped Pauline and Mario chased him down at a construction site), but I'm sure a Donkey Kong County-esque script is in the works with Seth Rogen as we speak. Rogen's mostly known for really raunchy comedies, so I'm sure this film's audio engineers have had to cut a lot of curse words out of his recordings.

SETH ROGEN

KING OF THE KOOPAS
BOWSER

Finally, the brilliant, boisterous and all-around lovable Jack Black has been cast as everyone's favorite Koopa King. If you don't know Jack, you really should get to – he's superb in films like School of Rock, the two most recent Jumanji sequels and, most pertinent to this impending performance, the Kung Fu Panda series, where he's voiced the main character Po since that franchise began back in 2008.

He'll have to do a full 180 from that heroic role in order to embody the villain here (but then we all know Bowser isn't *all* bad). It'll be fun to see how this movie makes him sympathetic to the audience – if at all. Or if they'll let Bowser have any musical numbers, taking advantage of Jack's additional skills as an incredible singer! (Google "Tenacious D" to see!)

JACK BLACK

BAYONETTA ORIGINS: CEREZA AND THE LOST DEMON

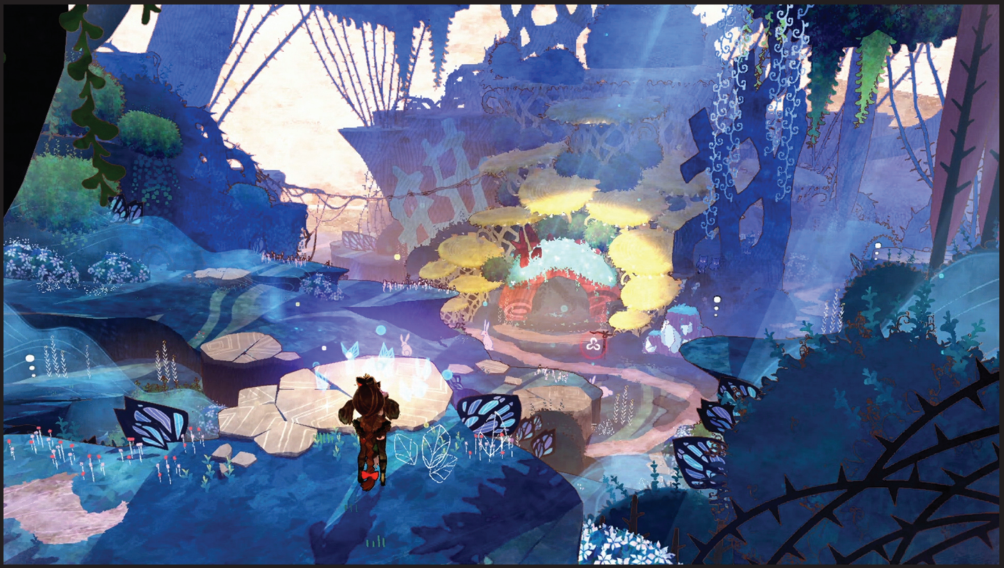
Where a little witch wanders through a watercolor world.

IN HER LATEST adventure, Bayonetta goes from being a regular lady in Mom jeans to Tokyo's reigning rollerskating queen, a one-eyed warlord on the Great Wall of China and, sometimes, a pacifistic, pouty-faced pre-teen who's got to solve environmental puzzles in order to proceed. No one expected that last one to be the first to get her own spin-off, but lo and behold, that's exactly what Platinum has planned – and they aren't wasting any time! Bayonetta Origins: Cereza and the Lost Demon is set for release in March, just six months after Bayonetta 3 dropped.

After the eight-year wait between her second and third adventures, getting another new Bayo adventure so soon almost feels like magic!

And to tell the truth, there are a few tricks at play here. Anyone going into this new bite-sized title expecting anything like the prior games in the franchise is in for a rude, but gentle, awakening. Though this prequel stars Cereza, the girl who grows up to be the titular wicked-weaving gun-shoe-wearing witch, it doesn't look or play like any of her other titles. Those who've completed all of Bayonetta 3 already know that firsthand, as that game contains a short, unlockable teaser for this one – sort of a prelude to a prequel.

Taking place in a magical forest with no real enemies in sight, this decidedly lighter slice of storybook fun finds Cereza skipping through a magical forest. She can pick up items, enchant some plants using simple rhythm game mechanics and . . . that's about it! Compared to the hyperactive dodging, dashing and smashing found in the fighting femme fatale's main games, it feels downright relaxing.



But that's just a tiny taste of what Bayonetta Origins has in store! When the full game releases as a standalone purchase on March 17, things will be much more fleshed out. Specifically, Cereza will be joined by Cheshire, the stuffed animal-turned-dastardly demon who's already a familiar face for the franchise. While the sorceress-in-training remains vulnerable and non-violent, her feline companion (who can be controlled simultaneously) tears up carnivorous creeps and ferocious fairies in her defense.

"Fairies?", you ask? That's another twist here that was softly hinted at in Bayonetta 3, but most fans did not expect to see it come back any time soon. Luka, a major character in the Bayo storyline, made his fairy debut in that title, thanks to the multiverse mishaps that make up the bulk of its playtime. Might this naturally spirited heartthrob make his way into Origins as well? It's all unknown, and these sorts of mysteries work to make the game's premise, centering around Cereza's search for her lost mother, all the more enticing. We also have no idea where her Dad is . . . but based on what we know about him from prior chapters in the Bayonetta saga, she may be better off without him.

According to director Abebe Tinari, who worked on localization for Bayonetta 2 and planning for Star Fox Guard, "a good fairytale transcends age," and that's exactly what this new T-rated title from Platinum's famed mascot aims to do. Will this new bedtime story and its gothic Goldilocks leading lady be just right on the Switch? We'll find out how close it hits the mark on March 17! **– JONATHAN**

SWITCH PUBLISHER: NINTENDO
DEVELOPER: PLATINUMGAMES
RELEASE: MARCH 17, 2023 RATING: T

RUNE FACTORY 3 SPECIAL

Another older Factory is getting refurbished.

THERE'S CERTAINLY BEEN a number of quality farming games released on the Nintendo Switch in the past year and a half, and another – in the form of a remastered remake – is set to join the fray. Rune Factory 3 Special, an updated port of 2010's Rune Factory 3 on the Nintendo DS, will be plowing, hacking and slashing its way to gamers in the West this Spring, after its initial release on March 2 in Japan.

Protagonist Micah's journey begins as he stumbles into quiet Sharance Village one dark and stormy night. He has no memory of his previous life, but it's clear he's no ordinary human – he's able to turn into a golden Wooly, and communicate with monsters! Along with tending the village's vacant farm, Micah must take advantage of his unique nature to mend bridges between the people of Sharance and the nearby settlement of monsters, then bring life back to the barren Sharance Tree.

Everything the protagonists do in Rune Factory titles goes into their development as a fighter, and this title is no exception: learning recipes lets Micah cook and consume food for attack and defense buffs, raw materials can be forged into armor and powerful weapons and monsters in the fields and dungeons can not only be recruited to fight alongside you in battle, but can also be brought back to your farm as livestock! There are plenty of dungeons to dive into, and Micah can recruit his friends to fight alongside him as he searches for his lost memories and the truth of what caused the rift between the two villages.

Like Rune Factory 4 Special (the previous Special remaster that launched on the Switch three years ago), there will be additional new content, such as new difficulty levels, updated graphics for both maps and character sprites, on-screen maps and side missions involving each of the 11 (!) eligible bachelorettes seeking Micah's monstrous hand in marriage. Who will you choose to woo? **– REBECCA**

SWITCH PUBLISHER: XSEED
DEVELOPER: NEVERLAND
RELEASE: SPRING 2023 RATING: T

STORY OF SEASONS: A WONDERFUL LIFE

And another older Harvest Moon is rising again!

ANOTHER BELOVED TITLE in the Harvest Moon series is getting a modern update on the Nintendo Switch under the Story of Seasons banner: the two Wonderful Life games, originally released for the GameCube in 2004 and 2005, will be reimagined as Story of Seasons: A Wonderful Life on June 27.

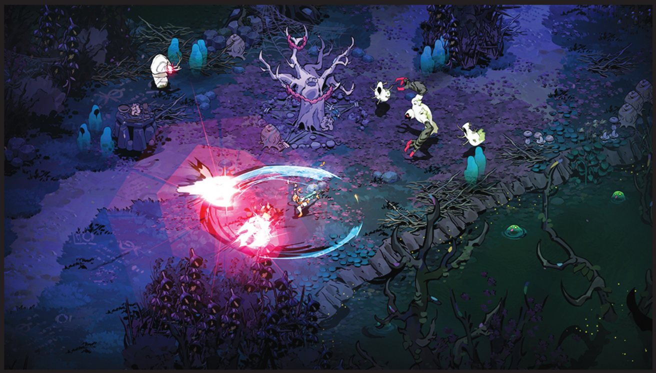
Unlike more open-ended games in the series, the Wonderful Life titles chronicle the life of your farmer as they arrive in Forgotten Valley, revitalize the old family farm, start a family with one of the eligible marriage partners, watch the people of the valley grow and change, see their children become adults and experience the golden years with their beloved by their side before passing from this world to the next.

Crops you grow on your farm can be hybridized by feeding a two-headed plant for more cash, you can raise the usual assortment of animals such as cows, chickens and sheep and there are town attractions like Griffin's café, as well as activities such as fishing and excavating at an archaeological dig site.

Along with the title and publisher change are a few other major changes. There's a few updated character designs, a few names are different (Celia is now Cecelia, Marlin is now Matthew and Muffy is now Molly) and there are two additional marriage candidates: Lumina (who was a bachelorette in A Wonderful Life: Special Edition on the PS2) and Gordy (a villager named Cody in the original). Also, along with new character customization options, you'll be able to marry any of the eligible candidates, as well as have your farmer be non-binary.

After the lackluster reception to Story of Seasons' Pioneers of Olive Town revamp, hopefully this revisited classic will hit fans right in the heart! **– REBECCA**

SWITCH PUBLISHER: XSEED
DEVELOPER: MARVELOUS
RELEASE: JUNE 27, 2023 RATING: E



HADES II

Supergiant is setting up a supersized sequel!

SOMETIMES A GAME is so successful that it totally shifts the culture of the studio that made it. Hades is one such game, as its devs at Supergiant Games have been committed to "no sequels" since the company was founded – but they almost had no choice but to make Hades II!

Yes, Hades was so phenomenally well received both critically and commercially that it's now getting a direct follow-up – but with a new hero in the starring role. Melinoë, like Zagreus from the first game, is another wildly obscure figure from Greek mythology, but for the purposes of Supergiant's spin on those ancient stories, she's a second child of Hades and Persephone – making her Zag's sister!

Like her brother, she's out to carve her way through endless waves of demons, beasts and ghouls using a variety of weapons. Her arsenal seems to be entirely new, though – she's got a dagger and a sickle shaped like a crescent moon that she dual-wields as a duo, as well as a spellcasting staff that can conjure all kinds of chaos. Melinoë herself is presented as a witch – and she's mentored by another mighty magic user named Hecate. (Who's quite a strict headmistress!)

Melinoë's goal is not battling her way out of the underworld, but rather into it – or wherever else it is that her father Hades has been imprisoned! The titular god of death has been captured by the great titan Kronos (or Cronos?), whom Hades says "is time itself." Can Melinoë defeat the keeper of all time? If Hades II is like the first game . . . probably not. Not on her first try, at least! But when she fails, she'll get to try again. I can't wait for my first failure in Hades II! **– LUCAS**

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: SUPERGIANT GAMES RELEASE: TBA RATING: T

MEGA MAN BATTLE NETWORK LEGACY COLLECTION

Internet access becomes a reality with new online multiplayer battles!

THE LAST TIME we talked about Mega Man Battle Network Legacy Collection, it was about the main premise of its games and their single-player action. What we weren't able to get into at the time was that the Battle Network series also has a multiplayer element, which Capcom is amping up in this upcoming re-release.

Perhaps the single greatest irony of the Mega Man Battle Network series was that it was a series of games all about online connectivity, yet it had none of its own. That means that if fans were up for a Player Vs. Player NetBattle, that would require dragging out ye ol' GBA Link Cables and playing head-to-head . . . literally.

This tended to constrain the multiplayer scene from really breaking out for many years. More recently, however, efforts made by dedicated fans who have created ways to not only have matches online, but more efficiently, have grown the scene substantially. For MMBN's 20th anniversary, Capcom even showed some social media support for MegaMasterX and his N1 Grand Prix, a competitive scene named for the tournament seen in the MMBN games and the MegaMan NT Warrior anime.

But now, Capcom is looking to make it official with Mega Man Battle Network Legacy Collection. A bevy of online functionality has been added, chiefly to functions that originally required the Link Cables so long ago. Now Operators the world over can compete online in Public and Private NetBattles, be they Casual fun or Ranked competitions. You can wager chips in Real Thing battles, or go for a best-of-three brawl in Triple Battle (in BN3 and up). In BN4, players can also join Version Battles and send NetNavis to tournaments, just like in the original.

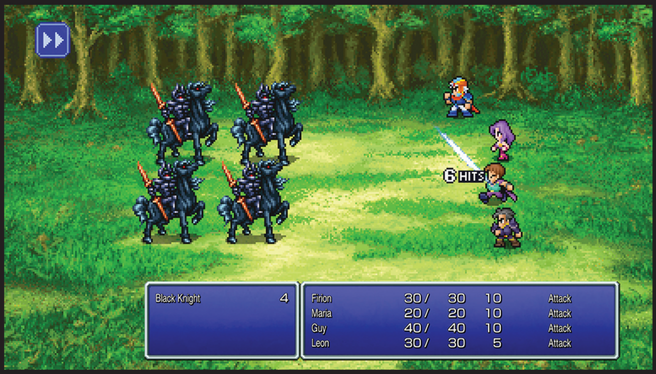
Not everything will be how you remember it, though, as the Custom screen will close after a set amount of time in online battles, in order to preserve the pace. And while glitches such as the Tree Bomb Prism will still do an absurd amount of damage during the story mode, they've been tweaked for multiplayer. (More adjustments are to be announced, but these give a pretty good idea of what kind of changes to expect.)

Multiplayer NetBattles aren't the only online element to look forward to. You'll be able to have public and private trades of Battle Chips, Style Changes in BN2 and Navi Customizer Programs. (Hmm, what do you think would happen if you just crammed the Customizer full of the infamous Humor program?) You'll also be able to compare your Battle Chip libraries in BN3 and beyond (which allows you to order more Chips), as well as records in BN4 and beyond.

Another great addition is that the Battle Chips that were originally only available through special events in Japan will be available to all in the Legacy Collection. These once hard-to-get Chips can be obtained through the MegaMan launcher for each title. And speaking of the launcher, pre-ordering purchasers will get cool Hub Style (Vol. 1) and Dark (Vol. 2) MegaMan skins to use on the virtual host version of MegaMan.EXE who resides there.

Unfortunately, there are still a lot of questions yet to be answered as we near the release date. The most prevalent of all may be, "Will there be rollback netcode?" That could make or break Capcom's online efforts with this release – let's hope for the best, so the original dream of the series can be fully realized! **– DAVID**

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: CAPCOM RELEASE: APRIL 14, 2023 RATING: E10+



FINAL FANTASY PIXEL REMASTERS

Revisit the first six Fantasy stories with newly remixed old-school visuals.

IT SEEMS FITTING that the first six Final Fantasy games, all of which initially released on Nintendo consoles, will soon arrive on Nintendo Switch!

The Final Fantasy Pixel Remaster series comes to Switch this Spring, after first releasing on PC and mobile in 2021 and 2022. This series includes Final Fantasy I-VI, remastered based on the games' original releases from the NES and SNES. Players will be able to purchase them individually or as a bundle at release.

The remasters will include several new additions, including new 2D pixel graphics, rearranged soundtracks, modernized UIs and auto-battle options. Players can also experience the games' concept art through an illustration gallery and listen to their soundtracks via a music player, both of which will have all the art and music available when you start the game.

Another feature is the inclusion of a bestiary, which has a mode where the beasts you encounter fill up the world map, so you can see where their natural habitats are. (And perhaps plan a level-grinding expedition.)

Basing the games off their original versions will allow for a nostalgia-fueled trip . . . but it also comes with some possible caveats for returning players.

The Pixel Remasters won't include extra content from these games' subsequent re-releases – and they've had several iterations over the years. For example, FFII's Game Boy Advance and PlayStation Portable versions included bonus dungeons, and that type of content isn't included here.

Having the first six Final Fantasy games available on one system is a boon for fans, though, as it can show step-by-step how this series has evolved throughout the years.

Each of these games are building blocks to what we know as Final Fantasy. The first game presents the series' recurring crystal motif, and its first group of Warriors of Light, with the iconic first appearances of FF series staples like the Fighter, Black Mage and White Mage.

Final Fantasy II, III and IV introduce key gameplay elements, such as a focus on character skills, the Job system and the Active Time Battle (ATB) system. Final Fantasy V and VI expand on those gameplay elements and provide settings and stories that are larger in scope.

Speaking of stories, you can expect a variety of tales in these games, which are set in traditional fantasy settings with recurring themes.

Final Fantasy I, III and V's narratives focus on heroes whose destinies are largely intertwined with crystals, and how they must use their newfound power to save their worlds.

Final Fantasy II, IV and VI feature more politically-centric stories, with the games' heroes uniting against tyrannical rulers and their conquest of other lands.

While these games first debuted 30 or so years ago, their role in the series remains significant.

For one, their stories still have the potential to be built upon! Just last year, Stranger of Paradise: Final Fantasy Origin released, providing an expansion to the lore of the series' first game.

But even more so, Final Fantasy has cemented itself as a dominant force in the JRPG space in the present, and it's in no small part thanks to these six games that helped lay the foundation all those years ago! **– MAGGIE**

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: SQUARE ENIX RELEASE: SPRING 2023 RATING: E10+

LOOP8: SUMMER OF GODS

Adventures in an August that never ends.

WHAT WOULD YOU do if you could relive one month of your life over and over? How many times would you try to get things right?

In the upcoming JRPG Loop8: Summer of Gods, you'll wrestle with these questions, as you can repeat the month of August until you're satisfied with your journey and ending.

There's a lot to consider along the way. Loop8 takes place in 1980s Japan, and most of humanity has been wiped out. Monsters called Kegai have ravaged Earth, leaving few safe havens. One of these being the small seaside town of Ashihara, where protagonist Nini finds himself at the start of the game.

Like the Fire Emblem, Persona and Trails series games, Loop8's gameplay combines turn-based combat and heavy social sim elements. The game is split between Nini's school life, where you choose how he spends his time and who he spends it with, and his time fighting Kegai in Yomotsu Hirasaka (the land between the living and the dead).

As Nini, players will cultivate relationships with characters via the game's Karel System. When you make dialogue choices, the system will determine how they affect characters' emotions and relationships, leading to lots of possibilities as you loop through August again and again.

The relationships you develop also bleed into Loop8's combat. Nini's combat prowess is decided by his bonds with his friends and how they are paired up in battle. Party members' actions will be based on their current moods and friendships with each other.

We've seen how JRPGs emphasize the importance of character bonds in combat through systems like Fire Emblem supports and Persona confidants, but I think Loop8 is poised to take this concept to another level with its central focus on player choice and relationships. I'm already preparing myself to agonize over all the decisions to come! **— MAGGIE**

SWITCH PUBLISHER: XSEED
DEVELOPER: MARVELOUS
RELEASE: JUNE 6, 2023 RATING: T

GRIMGRIMOIRE ONCEMORE

A PS2 visual spectacle gets an HD re-release.

WELL, IF YOU like time loops, I've got another option for you to consider before Loop8 arrives. Were you the kind of kid who loved going back to school at the end of the summer, or the kind who dreaded it?

In GrimGrimoire OnceMore, you step into the boots of Lillet Blan, a witch-in-training newly enrolled in a magical academy. Unfortunately, tragedy befalls the school less than a week after Lillet's first semester starts, and most of her classmates and professors are killed! It falls to this brand-new student to defend the facility and the faculty, but she lacks the magical education to be able to conjure anything more than the wimpiest of defenses. The solution? Time travel!

Lillet relives the first five days of the school year over and over, with each trip through the time loop granting her a little more learning and magical might. She's got a lot to study! There are four different categories of magic – Sorcery, Alchemy, Necromancy and Glamour – each of which is strong against one of the others. She'll need to be well-versed in them all in order to tackle the main gameplay: real-time strategy battles!

Yes, while GrimGrimoire doesn't look like a typical RTS, its combat is all about strategic troop movement and resource gathering. You'll send fairies, elves and other minions to harvest mana, then summon even greater magical beasts to battle back against the demons trying to take over the school!

And it all looks great! This game first launched in 2007, when its bold art set it apart. Now it's in HD and widescreen! It looks so appealing that it'll make anyone happy to go back to school! **— LUCAS**

SWITCH PUBLISHER: NIS AMERICA
DEVELOPER: VANILLAWARE
RELEASE: APRIL 4, 2023 RATING: E10+

PIKMIN 4

Four new elements for the fourth main game!

THERE'S MORE IN store in Pikmin 4!

Following up on the game's reveal, Nintendo recently gave us a real look at what the upcoming fourth mainline Pikmin adventure is set to contain. So let's hit four of the highlights, one by one!

SPACE DOGGO!

Pik-man's best friend is being added to the mix for this next mission.

In addition to keeping up with up to 100 little Pikmin soldiers in a variety of different colors, you'll also get to have a 101st ally in your exploration: a space dog named Oatchi! Yes, in the grand tradition of Yoshi meeting Poochy, Luigi befriending Polterpup and Mega Man's robo dog Rush, the Captains of Pikmin 4 have adopted themselves a canine. And quite a capable canine at that!

Oatchi has at least four jobs that we've seen so far. First up, he can be a battering ram, crashing through obstacles like cracked pots to open up new pathways. Second, he can drag defeated foes and/or treasures back to home base, with the strength of 10 Pikmin! Third, he can carry an entire squad of Pikmin on his back, and the Captain character as well, serving as a means of safe transport across bodies of water (and just keeping the whole group together in a tighter formation). Finally, he can sniff out the locations of the next new element . . .

THE CASTAWAYS

Pikmin 4 appears to have four new Captain characters (seen in the shot above), but beyond that team of protagonists it seems like some other natives of Hocotate have managed to get themselves stranded on Planet PNF-404 and are in need of rescue. Oatchi (though he has no nose?) can seemingly smell these civilians in need of assistance and can point you and the Pikmin in the right direction to be able to find and save them.

But who are the castaways? The one we've seen looks kind of like a blank slate — so are they mystery characters with identities revealed later on? Are they nameless, inconsequential NPCs that disappear as soon as you save them? Or could this be a system kind of like Pokémon Legends: Arceus' lost satchels, where castaways you find represent players who fell in battle while playing their own copy of Pikmin 4? I'm eager to know more!

COLD AS ICE

Can I interest you in a brand-new type of Pikmin? Just like Pikmin 2 debuted White and Purple Pikmin and Pikmin 3 introduced Winged and Rock types, we now get to meet the chilly Ice Pikmin!

Elemental ice attacks are a classic part of decades' worth of games, so your instant prediction is correct: They can freeze their enemies. Turning a Bulborb into a popsicle might entail sacrifice, though — a full freeze will possibly only take place if one of the Ice Pikmin gets eaten, the same way you had to sacrifice White Pikmin in order to inflict poison on foes in Pikmin 2.

Less sad is their secondary usage: freezing water to make it into a walkable surface for the rest of the troop. (That's two new ways to get past water obstacles . . . Pikmin 4 is anti-water, confirmed.)

NIGHT MODE

Finally, have you ever wondered what happens on PNF-404's surface after the sun sets? In all past Pikmin games you'd jet off into orbit at dusk, and any Pikmin left behind got chomped off-screen by seemingly unbeatable (but never seen) nocturnal predators. Well, Pikmin 4 looks like it's finally going to let us live dangerously and stick around after night falls!

In what looks like it'll be some kind of separate challenge mode, nighttime in Pikmin 4 presents the same courses you'll explore by daylight — but under the cover of darkness they're filled with a new kind of glowing gems (that look a lot like Super Mario Galaxy's Star Bits). Can you avoid the likes of the imposing red-eyed Bulborb seen below in order to safely excavate the moonlit jewels? You only have to wait until July 21 to find out! **— LUCAS**

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: NINTENDO RELEASE: JULY 21, 2023 RATING: RP

GHOST TRICK: PHANTOM DETECTIVE

Capcom summons a specter from the past.

WHILE ACE ATTORNEY has had a home (or should I say court-room?) on Switch for some years now, soon, another Nintendo DS mystery game from creator Shu Takumi will find its way to modern platforms.

An HD remaster of Ghost Trick: Phantom Detective will arrive this Summer on the Switch. It originally released in 2011 on DS, with an iOS port following in 2012.

Instead of navigating courts and crime scenes as Phoenix Wright, you'll go in between the lands of the dead and the living in Ghost Trick. Protagonist Sissel awakens as a ghost with no memories, and he's informed that he has just one night to figure out the mystery sur-rounding his death.

Thankfully, being a ghost has its perks. With his newfound abilities, Sissel can possess items in the ghost world (where time moves more slowly), and then manipulate those items in the world of the living.

Figuring out which items to take control of and move provides the foundation for this mystery adven-ture's puzzle-based gameplay, as players must find the right combi-nation to continue their path forward.

This release will have upgrades including an improved resolution, framerate and user interface, a remastered soundtrack from composer Yasumasa Kitagawa, a collection feature for artwork and music and the addition of several new language options. Another new feature involves challenges you can take on as you play.

It's always nice to see older games get the re-release treatment on Switch, and with this upcoming remaster, now may be just the time to get into the spirit of Ghost Trick! **— MAGGIE**

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: CAPCOM RELEASE: SUMMER 2023 RATING: T

WE LOVE KATAMARI REROLL + ROYAL REVERIE

Roll out with the King of All Cosmos, as a boy!

THE CULT OF Katamari has a new reason to rejoice! The second sweetly surreal entry in the series, We Love Katamari, is finally coming to Nintendo consoles. It's also the last Katamari game that franchise creator Keita Takahashi ever worked on. And what a swan song it was!

While the first Katamari Damacy (released on Switch as Katamari Damacy REROLL) worked as a won-derful introduction to Katamari's core concept (a cosmic prince rolls up everything he sees into a giant ball of trouble), this second outing is where it all really came together. The level of variety here is simply astounding! Rolling as fast you can down a racetrack, pushing a sumo wrestler into piles of food so he can pork up for a title match, taking your clump under the sea for some floaty physics, around a camp-ground filled with fireflies or into space where entire planets enter your orbit — those are just a few of the new big ways We Love Katamari changes the game.

And this new REROLL version is set to include five all-new challenge stages, subtitled Royal Reverie, where you take on the "role" of the Prince's ridiculous, insidious father. The original We Love Katamari featured flashbacks showing how this King of All Cosmos went from an innocent child to a tyrannical monarch, and we can guess that these new stages will further flesh out that backstory. It's the first new piece of playable Katamari content to hit home systems in over a decade!

You'll also be able to take selfies in this version. That's cute-amari!

Despite starting off as a proto-type for the GameCube, the first Katamari game took forever to make it to Nintendo consoles. Thank goodness Switch owners will only have wait until June 2 for its sublime sequel! **— JONATHAN**

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: BANDAI NAMCO RELEASE: JUNE 2, 2023 RATING: E

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: TEARS OF THE KINGDOM

Link is on the move!

HYRULEAN VEHICLES HAVE come a long way since Zelda 1's simple wooden raft.

The Wind Waker upgraded our hero to actually sailing (and his boat even talked to him). Spirit Tracks presented a version of the kingdom that had fully embraced travel by rail — so Link got to be a train driver! And how about riding on a full-on, full-throttle motorcycle? Breath of the Wild's DLC swept us into that reality, further shifting this "fantasy" world into some kind of techno-futuristic/medieval mash-up.

. . . All of that is about to look tame compared to what the new Tears of the Kingdom is cooking up! Who would have thought that a major inspiration for this next Zelda series sequel would be Banjo-Kazooie: Nuts & Bolts?

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: NINTENDO RELEASE: MAY 12, 2023 RATING: E10+

BUILD YOUR OWN RIDE

Just like that unfairly unloved third installment in the B-K series, players in this game will be called upon to craft functional vehicles out of piles of initially separate components. Again, that seems like an idea coming from way out of left field when connected to the Zelda brand — but Breath of the Wild did prep us for this kind of thing not just with its Master Cycle Zero, but with the prominence of the Divine Beasts, all of which were enormous, animal-shaped vehicles! (You could even pilot them in Hyrule Warriors: Age of Calamity.)

So vehicles are swerving back into the spotlight, only this time around the shapes they'll take will be up to you and your imagination. Pictured here are two possibilites. In the first screenshot up above, Link has fused four propellers onto a square slab to make himself a kind of drone to ride up into the sky. In the bottom right screenshot below . . . he's built a car! It's still so odd, even after all the boats and trains and laser-shooting robot elephants of the past.

So, why a car? The drone copter thing is understandable, as I even said in our last preview that Link would need some kind of equivalent to the Loftwing from Skyward Sword to be able to more easily travel between the many sky islands. But a four-wheeled automobile? Hyrule doesn't exactly have a lot of flat, open, obstacle-free land in which having one of those would be very useful.

So it's likely that Link will find himself facing specific challenges that will necessitate him building creative contraptions. That car might have been constructed to haul the mystery item we can just catch a glimpse of riding in the small wooden compartment behind our hero. Maybe it's too heavy to just pick up and carry? Will we need to defend it from enemies?

ENDLESS POSSIBILITIES

One of the best parts of Breath of the Wild was the freedom its gameplay mechanics allowed. Nintendo did things like make fire, electricity and magnetism all work like you'd expect they would, then turned players loose in an open world and let them create their own fun — six years later people are still coming up with kooky things that no one else has ever tried before! With this new crafting system in place, Tears of the Kingdom will be set up to go viral itself for years to come with players posting wacky "Have you tried *this?"* video clips and everyone competing to invent the oddest vehicles imaginable, I'm sure. I can't wait to see them all!

KEEPING IT SIMPLE

If all that feels intimidating, though, I'm sure the game will be perfectly playable without wild custom car concepts and the like. We'll still have riding on horseback to get around, as well as paragliding. (The paraglider is customizable now! Tap Zelda series amiibo figures to swap out its cloth!)

So whether you're a contraptioneer or a simple wooden raft enjoyer, Tears will surely make you smile. **— LUCAS**

WHAT IS THE LEGACY OF THE NINTENDO 64?

A roundtable discussion to define the N64's lasting impact!

LUCAS: Every once in a while, while the NF team is busy brainstorming content to include in our next issue, a conversation so compelling comes along that I'll feel like it should be shared directly with our readers. It happened again as we began our prep for NF #64, as unrestrained opinions on the legacy of The Fun Machine flowed forth freely from several of our team members. It was a discussion that emerged organically, but after seeing what was taking shape of its own accord, I encouraged everyone to continue, so that this time we really could just print it all here in the magazine itself for all of you to enjoy! So here's a glimpse behind the scenes of Nintendo Force issue planning: a real record of earnest opinions about the Nintendo 64 and its impact on the game industry!

JONATHAN: The N64 is easily my least favorite Nintendo hardware and Nintendo console game library.

JOHN-CHARLES: Maybe there's just something in Holmes DNA, because I also am generally not a big fan of N64 as a whole — Sin & Punishment is maybe the only game to actually make me like the form factor of the N64 controller. As far as I'm concerned, it's the only game on that system that doesn't play better on a normal controller!

DAVID: I kind of know where the Holmeses are coming from — the Nintendo 64 is the console that drove me to buy a PlayStation!

Don't get me wrong, I got my N64 before the official release date (and was initially confounded by the lack of an included RF switch) and enjoyed a fair few games for it, but . . . Mega Man 8. Mega Man X4. Mega Man Legends. There was no way I wasn't going to play those, so the choice was kind of made for me.

It was a weird time, as all these titles I'd come to know from playing on Nintendo platforms were all showing up on the competition: Mega Man, Metal Gear, Street Fighter, 2D Castlevania, Contra . . .

I ended up missing some of the latter-day N64 stuff at the time. Melee was my first Smash Bros. experience, and The Thousand-Year Door my first Paper Mario — I didn't wind up playing their predecessors until the Virtual Console came along.

KRIS: N64 is also by far my least favorite Nintendo platform and library. And same here, it's the console that convinced me to expand my horizons. I bought a PlayStation for Castlevania, and I also bought my first Genesis. I stuck with my 64 to the end, though, but with few exceptions, the N64 library is definitely not my favorite.

But there's a real nostalgia attached to the promise of what the N64 represented at the time. I'll never forget the hype for that machine, the lead-up to Ocarina and the crazy fun local multiplayer stuff that PlayStation and Saturn just couldn't match.

JONATHAN: Yeah, the N64 is my least favorite Nintendo console, and there are no games I like on there. But there are a handful of games on there that I absolutely LOVE. It's all or nothing with that thing.

Dr. Mario 64, Majora's Mask, Sin & Punishment, Paper Mario, Star Fox 64 and a few others are among my all-time favorites.

Also, I still dream of the weird port of Final Fantasy VI for the N64 that was teased in magazines decades ago. I'd still buy it!

Was the N64 the start of the "Sad Afterthought Third-Party Port" trend for Nintendo consoles? I feel like it was, at least for Capcom, who released Mega Man Legends and Resident Evil 2 for the N64 way after the heat on both those titles had cooled.

KRIS: It absolutely was. Presumably because it was the start of Nintendo choosing wacky storage mediums. Carts for N64, mini DVDs for GameCube, and then with the Wii they effectively put themselves a generation behind in terms of raw power. I get why they did all those things, and it created some advantages for them for sure, but it had side effects, and third-party support suffering was one of them.

TONY: Quality of the library aside, the aesthetic of software on N64 (and PS1 by extension) is a source of immense comfort the older I get. It doesn't look GOOD compared to literally any other gen, but the soft, low-poly fuzziness of the 64 and the sharp, pixelated surfaces of the PlayStation are somewhat cozy. They remind me of Saturday mornings and weekend game rentals, of friends huddled around a tiny CRT box in four-player madness, of hardware trying its hardest to realize the three-dimensional worlds we always imagined but could never physically see in the flat sprite days.

MATTHEW T.: I enjoy the N64 a lot and discovered a newfound appreciation of it last year when I went retro-crazy. It's still one of the weaker Nintendo home consoles in my eyes due to its tiny library, but I still love my collection of some 30-odd cartridges. The Rareware stuff in particular was incredible and unlike anything that came before . . . or since! It's hard to believe they made 11 games (in nearly as many genres) in six years. And half of them are all-time greats!

JONATHAN: Yeah, these days pixel art isn't the way to get people to feel nostalgic. Lone Survivor, a great pixel art game, recently turned 10 years old, and celebrated it with a re-release on Switch. When the game first came out, it inspired nostalgia for the 16-bit days. And now, released again 10 years later, it inspires nostalgia for . . . indie games from 10 years ago? But even then, not really, because pixel art has truly proven to be a way to make timeless visuals. You can't really attach them to any particular era of gaming anymore.

Maybe low-poly graphics will get there too, but for now, they communicate a certain humility that kids of the PS1/N64/Saturn really identify with. Like those polygons were just newborn babies back then. At the time, of course, the marketing of polygon-based games tended to lord their "newness" over pixel art, claiming that they were "the more grown-up evolution" of gaming. And I hated them for that, haha! But now that they are seen as old, antiquated and low-budget, they have an authentic, underdog charm that I can really get behind.

TONY: Another facet that defines the 64-bit era for me is that it's my most "unfinished business" console ever. Because games on the platform were longer than ever before, there are so many that I barely started, or just got partway through before having to return them to the rental store. And while emulation helped me patch up my NES and SNES blind spots, less adequate N64 emulation meant I've put those games on the back burner, waiting for more ideal

conditions. I stopped just before the final area in Banjo-Kazooie and never even touched the sequel, only got halfway through Mystical Ninja and Rayman 2, similarly stopped before the end in Bomberman 64 . . . I even have a curiosity for Castlevania, if only because my college roommate spoke fondly of the game in his youth. There are others I could mention, not because I think they are necessarily hidden gems, but because I always meant to rent them but never did, and 20+ years later the urge remains.

KRIS: Castlevania isn't anywhere near as bad as its reputation. It's no masterpiece, but I put a ton of time into it back when it launched. I never beat the final boss though. Got stuck and sadly never went back.

BRETT: I played the N64 a ton back in the day and I even have the DD expansion. I also have the mouse and the bio sensor and a one-handed controller!

But let's ask ourselves the question that we've been circling around: What is the N64's legacy?

Misstep? Formative? Demonstrative? Nintendo jumped ahead in some aspects and shot themselves in the foot with others, all while watching the company they almost partnered with soar above them and become their greatest competitor in that era. Imagine what a Nintendo PlayStation could have done!

DAVID: My favorite thing about the N64 is watching people try to figure out the controller.

Never had a Controller Pak. For some reason, the games I played didn't use them.

Rumble Pak, though . . . now there's a legacy.

LINDSEY: I'm definitely in the "Basic Nerds Who Loved Banjo-Kazooie and Played It Too Many Times" cabal, lol. Anyone else remember the prank Rare pulled on people by promising secret cheat codes to anybody who solved a ridiculous Banjo-themed math problem? GOOD TIMES!

I had both a PS1 and N64 back in the day, and while PS1 has a stronger overall library IMO, the games I loved on N64 were ones I *really* loved. Banjo-Kazooie, Pokémon Stadium, Pokémon Snap, Ocarina of Time, Majora's Mask, Mischief Makers, Paper Mario . . . all great! Not to mention the original Smash Bros.! I remember bringing my N64, four controllers and Smash to school, and everyone, even classmates who had no interest in video games otherwise, was into it.

I personally like the "softer" art style of the N64's graphics more than PS1's pixelated stuff (though I do love the pixels too — Solid Snake's face will always be a wonderful collection of pixelated shadows to me, lol). It just reads as more cartoony to me, and I do love me some cartoony. The two consoles ended up having very different tones.

That said, the N64's misses were pretty bad. I was so annoyed that Castlevania 64 didn't have any of the cool features that were promised and was such a pain in the butt to play besides (Legacy of Darkness was an improvement, but still). Of course at the time the biggest complaint was that there was no huge JRPG in the library.

Oh, and my big N64 hot take: I like Diddy Kong Racing more than Mario Kart 64.

MATTHEW T.: Diddy Kong Racing *is* better than Mario Kart 64, but I've got an even hotter take: Paper Mario is better than the PS1 Final Fantasy games.

JONATHAN: I think it's inarguable that Paper Mario looks better than all the PS1 FF games.

Unless you're nostalgic for bad graphics. Then they look amazing, haha!

BRETT: While it may have been outsold, it was definitely the best party console to that point. Four controller ports was so huge for split-screen and co-op. I miss those couch co-op days. How many people broke controllers? I never did, but a friend of mine lost a stick to the infamous Mario Party. Anyone get the gloves Nintendo offered?

LINDSEY: I would argue that Final Fantasy IX and Chrono Cross still look very pretty. At that point it's a matter of apples and oranges, since the different styles are going for different things.

I guess another big moment for the N64 would be Conker's transformation from a family-friendly cuddly character to a boozing, swearing murderer. As a teen I found the change hilarious, but these days there's a lot about Conker that causes me to roll my eyes. And it was a huge deal at the time! It came about around the time that the concept of "cartoons where characters are allowed to die and there's no PSA about doing your homework and eating your vegetables at the end" was reaching a wide audience in America, so in a weird way it's culturally relevant.

JONATHAN: FFIX is a fantastic looking game, but as a lot of kids say today, the graphics look "broken" compared to Paper Mario. You can tell that they wanted the whole game to look like the cutscenes, but the tech couldn't make that happen at the time. Paper Mario, on the other hand, looks like it's exactly what it wants to be, other than a few rough edges around characters and objects in the environment.

DAVID: And of course, Mega Man Legends has held up incredibly well. (Just a shame about how Mega Man 64 turned out.)

I love how the models and such look sharper on N64, but hate the tearing in the tiles for the backgrounds in places . . .

That also reminds me: Am I the only one who isn't a fan of the "64" suffix? I feel like it really kind of dates the games that use it . . .

Actually, I'm not even sure that I completely dislike it . . . it might be so bad that it's circled around back to having some sort of ugly charm to it.

KRIS: You're definitely not alone. I've never been a fan of slapping "64" on the end of titles. Even less of a fan of slapping the "64" on the end of games that didn't actually have it in the title, like Superman and Castlevania!

In general I found that whole generation difficult to look at, especially at the time. We came off of gorgeous sprites on the Super NES and Genesis and jumped to chunky, crunchy polygons. There were a few exceptions during that era that managed to make good use of what the consoles were capable of, like Ocarina of Time and Metal Gear Solid. But lots of other games, especially the Square RPGs, had these elaborately detailed rendered backgrounds and hideous chunky characters running around in them. It always looked so incongruous to me.

On the other hand, that generation gave us the likes of Symphony of the Night and Mischief Makers, games that showed what next-generation hardware could accomplish in terms of 2D gaming, and they were an awesome sight to behold.

Mega Man Legends, though – that game's in a league of its own. Like Wind Waker on GameCube, it's a perfect example of art direction transcending technology. That game is timelessly good-looking and way more expressive than just about anything else the PlayStation did. But yeah, shame about Mega Man 64. Still looks really good, just not quite *as* good.

The whole generation had growing pains, and was a necessary step backward in terms of visuals so developers could learn how to make 3D games. Needless to say, I'm glad 2D gaming made a triumphant return eventually.

DAVID: Yeah, that generation honestly had me questioning if I'd be able to stick with gaming over the long haul, if 2D was going to go extinct the way some apparently thought it should at the time.

Incidentally, I don't mind appending "64" on games so generically titled as those. It makes it easier to distinguish between them and, say, their NES counterparts in conversation – sort of like Sonic '06, or referring to the first game in a series with a 1.

But Mega Man 64? What was wrong with Mega Man Legends? Heck, "Mega Man Legends 64," if you must!

The DS ports of N64 games just made it worse.

BRETT: When I first fired up Super Mario 64, I thought it was a step back in graphics, but a step up in gameplay. As Nintendo taught me how to navigate a 3D space, it became less about the looks and more about the goals, but it was still disappointing coming off games like SMRPG and DKC with their rendered graphics, or gorgeous sprites like Secret of Mana or FFVI. I think Star Fox 64 was a better jump, as I had played that on SNES, and now seeing bigger explosions and more detailed graphics while exploring new styles of play was great. That and F-Zero X, because there hadn't been a sequel on SNES, even though it was a launch title. Titles like Yoshi's Story took the DKC style of rendered graphics to 64 and they looked amazing, but I feel the gameplay suffered on that one because I was looking forward to a Yoshi's Island sequel and got something more . . . unique. I hated the forced replay to get to other levels.

Kirby 64 was a great mix of both 3D and 2D, and its combination mechanic is still my favorite, but mostly because you can turn Kirby into a fridge. And now he can be a vending machine!

Zelda just blew everyone out of the water, but I felt its music wasn't as good as A Link to the Past's. Some will argue with me, and it definitely has some good music, but a lot of the soundtrack was more atmospheric, and I preferred the dungeon themes and castle theme of ALTTP. Majora's Mask is the most "out there" Zelda to this day.

DAVID: Oh, I totally hear you. After Nintendo hyped up DKC and Killer Instinct with CGI renders from the computers that made Jurassic Park and Terminator 2 look so good, my jaw hit the floor when I saw the first screens of Super Mario 64 . . . and not in a good way.

I was aghast. Hoping it was still early on. Hoping that by the time it launched it would look like the renders being used to promote it. (All I had to go on at the time were their words – I didn't know much better.)

Of course, it didn't, but magazines like Next Generation (who even started using the promo images over screenshots – in one case, literally) got me hyped for the gameplay, and I grew to love Super Mario 64 despite the huge visual step back from Donkey Kong Country.

Meanwhile, not understanding the visual trickery at play, I wondered why Mario and his friends looked so much better in Mario Kart 64.

It wouldn't be until the GameCube era (which was foreshadowed by the Dreamcast) that I felt that graphical chasm had been crossed – and then some!

LINDSEY: I was never really bothered by the simplicity of the 3D graphics of the time. I was trying so hard to figure out how games/cartoons worked since I wanted to make them*, so by then something had pinged in my brain that "lots of things on-screen = game slows down = there must be a limit to how many things can be on the screen." I had at one point imagined what a game would look like if it used "a lot of shapes" to render what would appear to be rounded forms from a distance, but then realized that the SNES would nearly implode if too many things showed up in Star Fox or Stunt Race FX and just figured, "Oh . . . we're not there yet, I guess?"

So when we entered the N64 and PS1 era, I just embraced the leap forward with open arms! Any time a new game came out in that era I just appreciated how they could do so much with so few polygons – just like how I was awestruck by how the 8- and 16-bit consoles could make anything look recognizable with so few pixels. Funny that you bring up Mario Kart 64, because I remember having an aha moment where I connected the dots: "Oh wait . . . *that's* why they're all flat sprites! So the game won't slow down and melt into its base components!"

I actually miss that aspect of that whole age, honestly. These days if there's going to be a big new game with, I dunno, a space man fighting zombie dragons, then you already know that everything is going to be rendered to look as realistic as possible. And that's cool and all, but I've also seen it too many times, and the familiarity just kind of bores me. I love seeing what people do when they have to use limited resources, because then they can get really creative and they start emphasizing what's especially important to them. So yeah, I'm here to defend the pointy googly-eyed awkward 3D beasts of the gaming world!

**(still do honestly!)*

KRIS: But for as much as I didn't like the visuals of early 3D, especially next to the likes of Donkey Kong Country or Yoshi's Island, there were these glimpses of how beautiful games would become in 3D. Mario 64 was super blocky, but that first area outside of the castle, with its ambient noise paired with the fluidity of Mario's movements, felt more real than Mario's world ever had before. The first time I saw the sun rise in Ocarina of Time. The amazing feel of 60fps racing through gravity-defying tracks in F-Zero X. Things like lighting effects that polygons could do that sprites couldn't at the time were really cool to see.

Star Fox is such a unique case too, because it was in every way an upgrade over the original (except in terms of music, and I will die on that hill!). Since the original was polygonal, 64 looked like an incredible upgrade.

And while I do love the Ocarina soundtrack, I like A Link to the Past's more too.

DAVID: Yeah, Star Fox 64 – I guess in lieu of much else – always felt more stylistic to me, and like a definite upgrade (at least, in some ways) over the original.

MATTHEW T.: Agreed 100% on the Star Fox SNES soundtrack being superior. That John Williams-esque space epic sound is incredible and inspiring. The credits theme alone is one of Nintendo's all-time best! SF64 is probably still the best game in the series, but its janky sound samples really hold it back. Just compare both games' main themes (one is a rousing, adventurous piece, the other a plodding, simplistic march), or both games' take on Corneria. It's like night and day!

JONATHAN: Yeah, I also love the music of the original Star Fox! And all of them, but the original especially.

BRETT: So we can all agree that the Star Fox SNES soundtrack beats Star Fox 64's. Good. I thought I was the only one!

JONATHAN: I'd argue that the Star Fox map music transition to the Stage 1 music is some of the most exciting, fun and intense music in all of video game history.

LUCAS: Let's start to wrap things up. As Brett suggested, let's have everyone answer the question "What is the legacy of the Nintendo 64?" What are your thoughts on the lasting impact of the N64 generation? How has it all rippled out and affected the decades since?

JOHN-CHARLES: I was lucky enough to work in a retro game store when N64 nostalgia was at its height (about 20 years after release). The games that got the most traction with my customers were absolutely the multiplayer staples – the wishlist for Mario Kart 64 was a mile long! Before the N64, if your game had two-player, you were usually going at it with your sibling or a disaffected parent, but the N64 really cemented what multiplayer really could be. No accessories needed, no modems, no extra cords . . . just four friends, four controllers and a weekend of fun.

Multiplayer absolutely defined the N64's legacy for most, and even now with couch co-op nearly dead and gone, booting up GoldenEye or Mario Party still has an unmistakable allure to Nintendo faithfuls – and I think you saw that accessible four-player experience live on across generations with titles like Super Smash Bros. Melee, Wii Sports and Nintendo Land.

TONY: Nintendo did itself no favors in sticking with cartridges instead of embracing disc media. Because of the high costs and storage restrictions associated with the format, less than 400 total N64 games were released across all markets – with Nintendo's own output grabbing the lion's share of sales and accolades. Such was the case in previous generations, sure, but the outstanding lack of in-demand third-party content this time gave birth to the stigma that only Nintendo software could succeed on Nintendo machines.

In the two decades since, the company has had to prove time and again that its ecosystem is not poisonous, that consumers are hungry for experiences outside of those Nintendo could provide. And yet, even today you hear stories of studio leaders like Yakuza's Toshihiro Nagoshi and Tekken's Katsuhiro Harada who actively avoid Switch development because they were burned at some point in the past and assume little has changed to better accommodate their projects.

So, thanks, Nintendo 64?

DAVID: Following on from what Tony said, I think Nintendo 64's most lasting legacy is removing Nintendo from their spot as king of the mountain.

KRIS: Another lasting legacy of the Nintendo 64 that's had an interesting turnaround is the notion that Nintendo platforms are just for kids. I was working video game retail when the N64 was on store shelves, and at that time being a "kid" system was a huge knock. The industry was trending toward the ultra-cool "made for grown-ups" mentality that centered around graphics and "mature themes." Games like Tomb Raider, Resident Evil and even new entries in long-running series like Final Fantasy were aiming for a degree of realism in the way their characters were being portrayed, and the kids who grew up on Nintendo weren't kids anymore, and they wanted their video games to grow up with them. So while everyone else was playing Metal Gear Solid and Soul Reaver, Nintendo was over there releasing stuff like Banjo-Kazooie and Pokémon Stadium. That reputation of not being cool stuck to them like glue, and while here in the U.S. customers were openly mocking them for it, Nintendo didn't seem to care. Their follow-up console was an adorable purple box with a handle, and Pokémon continued to make them buckets of cash.

But now that the industry seems to have largely shied away from the whole "realistic graphics are the be-all-end-all" mentality (many of the best-selling games these days don't even attempt to go for photorealism), being a platform that's considered by parents to be the place to get the games their kids want has helped position them as one of the strongest players in the industry. (As well as the system that's centered around local multiplayer, another thing the N64 trumpeted way more than its competition.) It was a rough generation to live through as a teenager, but Nintendo wouldn't be where they are today without those growing pains, so I'd say it was worth it.

JONATHAN: The kid-friendly content, the blocky, toy-like graphics and the focus on 3D exploration in big open worlds – these are the same key ingredients that went into making Minecraft and Roblox the two biggest games in the world. While both of them are generally ignored by the AAA enthusiast community, the two make more money and have way, WAY more players than realistic, serious-faced, M-rated games like The Last of Us or Elden Ring ever will.

So when it comes to keeping up with "mature" AAA trends and disc-based media, the N64 failed to keep up back when it was first released, but by today's standards, it's nearly a perfect fit for what most current game players want. That's why it's not so surprising that Pokémon Scarlet & Violet came out to negative reviews, criticising their "N64-level graphics" . . . before going on to be the fastest-selling games in the franchise's history. N64-looking games are not only acceptable to most people today, but their humble, approachable iconography actually makes them preferable. Just ask any YouTuber who makes a living releasing a new Minecraft or Roblox video every three days!

Just imagine if Nintendo paid tribute to their past, while also keeping up with the modern YouTube/Twitch celebrities, by releasing a new massive online open world playground/crafting game with N64-style graphics. Make it star all their big mascot characters, running around building Minecraft-like structures and Roblox-style games-within-games, and chances are it would do 10 times as well as any Smash Bros. title ever has.

JOHN-CHARLES: Funnily enough, I was actually just talking to a co-worker about how we're living through a 64-bit renaissance similar to how we went through something similar with 8-bit/NES graphics in he late '00s for a while. The same way you used to see 8-bit sprites on T-shirts and in indie games, we're already seeing that now with smaller games that look like they could've come out in 1997 – alongside a newfound fascination with Y2K-style graphic design and aesthetics with artists today.

Fashion is cyclical, so it only makes sense we're there now with stuff made by the people who grew up with those blocky graphics and enjoyed by kids who didn't grow up with the N64 and PS1. I'm wondering when we're gonna start seeing that same nostalgia hit for the GameCube. Maybe we're already there?

BRETT: Nintendo could drive this cultural movement more effectively by making their legacy titles more available. While many are fearful of what a game streaming service might do to the industry as a whole, I fear the loss of retro games more. Nintendo's efforts to stymie emulators have far surpassed any effort made to chronicle past titles with honor and respect. The most notable being Super Mario 3D All-Stars, when little was added to add value to simply having three ROMs running on one cartridge. We're also seeing very few remasters done from this era, where I think several of the games could benefit greatly from a full visual overhaul. The gameplay is there, and many could benefit from the upgrade to gain interest from other generations. Then again, if the blockiness and perseverance of Minecraft has allowed for a zeitgeist movement combining nostalgia with restrictive art styles, I wouldn't be surprised, but we need to see more collections released and sold to critical acclaim to make me believe it's actually a thing. Having recently played an indie title, Anodyne 2, that adopted the early polygonal style of the N64, I was certainly turned off, even though I recognized what they were attempting to accomplish. Perhaps that's my age showing . . .

From today's standpoint, after talking to my game store buddies, the cartridges last a lot longer than the PS1 discs. While it was certainly a detriment to Nintendo in storage capabilities, the cartridges do hold up well and were less prone to damage, whereas looking at a PS1 disc wrong could render it unplayable.

When thinking about the sheer amount of titles that were hits during this era, most belonged to PlayStation. However, most of those were single-player experiences. N64 had all of the party games, and when most people talk about that era, they remember having epic parties with a bunch of friends, and how they played GoldenEye, Smash, Mario Party and more.

LUCAS: Well, this was certainly a spirited spontaneous discussion! (Until I intervened a bit at the end to try to land things with everyone's thoughts on the system's lasting legacy.)

I suppose I'll close things out with my own opinion. As Brett just said, the N64 was the generation of the multiplayer party – while I loved my time journeying through Nintendo's first 3D worlds in games like Ocarina of Time, my warmest memories of the late '90s all center on the shared experience of getting together with friends, plugging four controllers in and staying up way too late playing the likes of Mario Party. I still do that with my kids to this day!

BY THOR THORVALDSON

GIVING MARIO A MAKEOVER

SUPER MARIO 64
N64, 1996

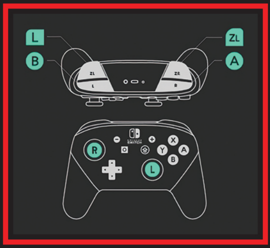
The most iconic image the Nintendo 64 ever produced might, in fact, be its first: the gleeful, grinning Mario that appeared to greet players just powering on Super Mario 64. It was a moment of pure joviality, as well as pure power: The 3D rendering capabilities of the hardware were instantly put on display in order to awe onlookers! (Gamers in 1996 had never seen such a "rounded" rendered character before!) Things got even more fun when players then used the hand cursor to pinch Mario's facial features and yank them out of shape! (Yowch!!) — **LUCAS**

ORIGINAL RELEASE: NINTENDO 64, AUGUST 25, 1997
PUBLISHER: NINTENDO
DEVELOPER: RARE

PLAYING IT TODAY

Most of the time the retro games we write about here in the Retro section are obscure relics, like Japan-only curiosities that are hard to come by — but that is absolutely not GoldenEye. So many millions of copies of this N64 cartridge were sold that even if you don't already have one in your own home, you could probably go outside and toss a rock at random in your neighborhood and hit a house that still has it hooked up in the basement.

Beyond seeking it out in its original form, though, it has also just been added to the lineup of Nintendo 64 classics available to play through the Nintendo Switch Online service as of this past January. We reviewed that version earlier in this issue! Flip back to Page 28 to read our fresh praise for its old/new features, like its widescreen display capability!



SWITCHING UP THE CONTROLS

If you do decide to sit down and play GoldenEye's new Nintendo Switch Online version, you'll probably be shocked at how screwed up its default control scheme feels when adapted to a Pro Controller or Joy-Cons. (And if we're being real, GoldenEye's control was never all that great even in 1997.) Luckily the Switch offers button remapping on the system level, so there's a way to make it play almost as well as a modern dual-stick shooter: Swap the left stick to act as the right, and vice versa. Then set ZR to act as ZL and ZL to act as L. Finally, in the game itself, pause while in a mission and switch the control scheme to 1.2 Solitaire, then the Look Up/Down to Upright instead of Reverse. Then you'll be all set!

25 YEARS LATER GOLDENEYE 007

Presenting 007 different things you may not have known about this N64 classic!

MY 16TH BIRTHDAY happened four days after GoldenEye 007 went on sale. Therefore I may, in fact, have had the world's first-ever four-player GoldenEye multiplayer birthday party! (And even if I didn't, I'm still going to claim it.)

Anyone else out there whose age is in the same ballpark as mine and is reading this magazine right now surely remembers what it was like to sit down with three other players and sink hours into this legendary game. It was a multiplayer masterpiece!

. . . But did you know it almost hit store shelves as a solo-only experience?

As GoldenEye just recently turned 25 years old — and even more recently made its debut in the NSO lineup — I've gone back to brush up on its development history. Now please allow me to share some highlights (007 of them!), and hopefully deepen your appreciation for this N64 classic!

001. LAST-MINUTE MULTIPLAYER

GoldenEye, the film, debuted in theaters in November 1995 — making GoldenEye the game already seem behind schedule, since the N64 hardware itself wouldn't even go on sale for almost another year after that. It was meant to be a launch title right alongside Super Mario 64 at its most optimistic point in production, but clearly missed that window. Its one-player campaign was completed and ready to ship by the following May — but then a few of its developers went rogue. With only six weeks left before the devs were supposed to be 100% done and go hands-off to let the game be pressed onto cartridges, they began work on a multiplayer mode — without telling Nintendo, or even their own bosses at Rare. They repurposed maps and character animations from the solo mode, got the four-way split-screen display functional in record time and finally showed it off to the higher-ups when it had become so much fun to play that there could no longer be any reality in which the game would ship as a one-player-only experience. The last-minute addition earned the game an extra delay back to August — putting its debut nearly two years after the movie it was based on — but it was worth it. Four-player matches defined GoldenEye! I can't imagine the game without them.

002. "NOT ME!" "NO WAY!"

Did you know that no one at Rare even wanted to make GoldenEye at first? Nintendo president Hiroshi Yamauchi was apparently a big Bond fan and had snagged the rights to create a game based on the next movie without talking to any of his development teams about actually doing it. As Bond is a British hero and Rare was a British team, the job was sent to them — but nobody had any interest in taking on a film license, since those games almost always ended up being terrible. Finally a new hire named Martin Hollis raised his hand. He was a huge Bond fan himself, and was thrilled by the thought of getting to work in that world.

But there was another problem: He had very little game-making experience. In fact, the entire team that ended up being assembled to make GoldenEye was filled with rookies! They had no real clue about how to make a good game — which ultimately worked to the game's benefit.

GoldenEye's level designs feel real. They're full of empty rooms that serve no purpose and corridors that take you to dead ends. As a result, players got a much more realistic spy experience!

003. DONKEY BOND COUNTRY?

GoldenEye was in development for around three years, which means it got started while the SNES was still active. In fact, since Rare had just scored a smash hit with Donkey Kong Country on the SNES, it first went into the works as a sidescrolling 16-bit platformer!

That planned SNES version of the game was briefly mentioned in Nintendo Power decades ago, but never got too far into development. When Rare heard about the 3D rendering capabilities of the upcoming N64 hardware, they quickly pivoted to making GoldenEye into a shooter!

. . . But not an FPS. Their first idea was to make it an on-rails experience, inspired by Sega's Virtua Cop games. It was only changed to be a fully controllable adventure after showgoers at a Nintendo Shoshinkai event in Japan saw a demo reel of the game and confusedly thought what they were seeing was a real FPS. "You've got a first-person shooter in the works! That looks totally amazing!" Well, with that reaction, they kind of had to make it into one, didn't they?

004. WE'RE JUST INNOCENT MEN!

Here's one you might have surmised just from playing the game through normally, but you know all those enemy soldiers Bond butchers with bullets as he's blazing through his missions? All perfectly innocent Rareware employees!

Rare developed a face-capturing method in order to create lifelike textures to apply to the heads of the in-game characters, and after inserting the likenesses of the film's stars (like Pierce Brosnan and Sean Bean), they were still left with a whole lot of blank mugs to fill in. So they just walked around the office and captured the faces of anyone they could find! Every developer is in the game somewhere – and even a Rareware janitor or two!

The most famous, though, is Dr. Doak – who is a real person! Dr. David Doak was an actual Rare developer before becoming GoldenEye's most beloved in-game NPC. Be good to the good doctor!

Years later Rare expanded their face recruitment efforts and scanned a few game journalists to appear as enemies in GoldenEye's follow-up, Perfect Dark – including a few of my former IGN colleagues! Sadly that was a few years before I joined the team there, so I was not immortalized myself as a killable N64 bad guy. (Feel free to beat up my Mii in Wii Sports Boxing in frustration.)

005. JUST ONE BOND TO BE

While Sean Bean signed off on his face being used in the GoldenEye game, Sean Connery sadly did not.

The final version of GoldenEye 007 features just one version of 007: Pierce Brosnan's. But originally the plan was for three of his predecessors to appear as well: Timothy Dalton, Roger Moore and the first-ever Bond actor, Sean Connery. Rare had each of their likenesses fully modeled and ready to be selectable in the multiplayer mode. Each of the four single-player save files also would've had a different Bond photo attached instead of the four identical copies of Brosnan's headshot seen in the final build!

The alternate Bonds were cut so late in development that they're all actually still in the game, and hackers have been able to access them. Rare just didn't get permission to use them as they should have, so they got the axe in the 11th hour!

That didn't stop them from adding other Bond characters, though. The devs apparently also never asked if they could use Oddjob, Jaws, Baron Samedi or Mayday either, but all of them made the final cut anyhow – and Oddjob went on to become infamous in the multiplayer mode for having such a small hitbox that anyone selecting him is basically cheating!

006. COMPOSITION IS SIMPLE

GoldenEye's gameplay is the stuff of legend, but its excellence might be matched by the sensational soundtrack. Surely such wonderful music must have taken a ton of work to compose, right?

Not necessarily! Grant Kirkhope, who has gone on to have an incredible career in video games and has written music for everything from Banjo-Kazooie to the Mario + Rabbids games, was one of two composers who made the majority of GoldenEye's music. It was one of his first jobs! Probably his most popular contribution to the setlist is the earworm-worthy "Watch Theme" – the music that plays when you pause the game and Bond stares at his wristwatch for a while. According to Grant, that particular piece took him only 20 minutes to make!

Imagine spending less than half an hour on any kind of creative project and having people still effusively praising it over a quarter of a century later. Insane!

007. WE'RE ALL FRIENDS HERE

This final bit of development insight is just too funny to ignore: Apparently the overwhelming amount of violence in GoldenEye had Nintendo worried at one point, and even the Bond film license holders objected to the video game version of 007 having such a high body count. So Nintendo sent feedback to the developers at Rare and told them that, when a mission was over, all the dead soldiers Bond had slain should stand up and wave. They'd all shake hands – maybe take a bow! All to reassure the player that no one really *died* here. It's all OK! Everybody was just *acting!*

Rare . . . did not take that advice. But 25 years later, thinking about it now, I wish they would have! It would've been hilarious! **– LUCAS**

THE BOSS FIGHT BOOK

If reading this article has left you hungry for more insights into the development of the great game of GoldenEye, be advised that there now exists an entire book dedicated to this very topic! The Boss Fight Books brand has been producing documentary-like books about great video games for a full decade now, and their latest release from just a few months ago just so happens to be all about GoldenEye 007. Author Alyse Knorr conducted brand-new interviews with the development team to unearth never-before-heard facts about what went on behind closed doors at both Rare and Nintendo. It's 256 pages packed with more information than even the world's best spy could uncover! Give it a look!

DON'T FORGET THE FILM!

Finally, in addition to that extracurricular reading recommendation, I've got some cinematic homework for you as well: If you haven't done so in the last few years (or ever!), make it a point to actually watch the GoldenEye movie! I hadn't seen it myself in the longest time until a recent rewatch, and it's amazing to see with the game also fresh in your mind – the developers captured the look of so many sets so well, and many of the sound effects were straight from the film too!

40 YEARS LATER MARIO BROS.

Remembering Luigi's true first appearance . . . on Game & Watch!

MY PROFUSE APOLOGIES!

To kick off the Retro section in our last issue, I paid homage to the original Mario Bros. arcade game. I did so in order to ignite another "Year of Luigi," since 2023 is the year Luigi is turning 40 years old! But I have to apologize, because I fell into a common trap: Mario Bros. actually wasn't Luigi's first appearance in a video game! Instead, his first appearance came in . . . wait for it . . . Mario Bros. (The Game & Watch version!)

Yes, just a few months before Mario and Luigi first competed against each other to bash the POW Block, topple Shellcreepers and kick Fighter Flies as a pair of plumbers in the sewers beneath New York City, they had a different job: They were assembly line workers in a bottling plant!

Mario Bros. on Game & Watch was a twin-screened handheld game unit that tasked players to control both of the Mario twins in tandem. Luigi was on the left side of the unit, while Mario appeared on the right. Both brothers had identical controls, with simple half-sized D-Pads made so each one could only move up or down. Stacked vertically between the bros, and stretching across the gap between the two screens, was a set of five different conveyor belts.

The goal of the game was controlling both Mario and Luigi to successfully send boxes of bottles back and forth across each conveyor belt, without dropping any along the way. Each box first appeared on Mario's side, at the bottom right of the playfield, so Mario would grab the empty container to his right, pivot to his left and place it on the lowest conveyor belt. That belt would then carry the box across to Luigi on the leftside screen – and the bottling factory's machinery would insert a few bottles into the box before it got to his waiting hands. Luigi would then grab it, move it up to the second conveyor, and it would head back to Mario.

In what must be the world's most inefficient and terribly designed bottling plant ever, the brothers would have to pass a single box back and forth five different times in order for it to pass through the machine enough times to be totally filled with bottles. On a box's final pass through the screen transition at the top of the playfield, the finally completed package of bottles would get wrapped up with a ribbon, making it ready for delivery. Luigi then had the final task of grabbing the box one last time and depositing it onto the flatbed of a waiting delivery truck.

What a crazy, kooky and all-around crafty gameplay design! Many of Nintendo's Game & Watch games were made to highlight the challenge of multitasking, and sure enough, Mario Bros. succeeded. It starts out slow, with just a lone box in play that's passing back and forth between the bros, but it ramps up in speed and intensity by introducing more and more boxes over time, such that both brothers are dashing up and down their ladders with just split seconds to spare in order to keep the bottles from sailing off the end of the line and crashing to the floor below.

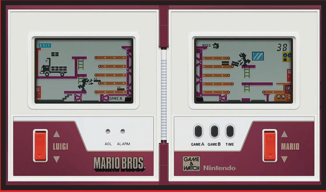
If you did miss grabbing a box in time (and of course you would, eventually), then Mario and Luigi's boss would appear and yell at them for being butterfingered fools! They'd then be assigned a "miss," and after three misses, it was Game Over.

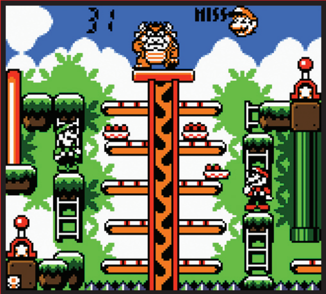
Mario Bros. on Game & Watch was a fascinating game that has gone unsung for too long, especially in discussions of the history of Luigi! I've been part of that problem myself, and I apologize. *Maybe* there's a chance that Nintendo will acknowledge this game's importance again at some point in the future? Because even their official videos and historical records seem to claim that the arcade Mario Bros. game marked Luigi's debut. It didn't! Now you know the truth! **– LUCAS**

ORIGINAL RELEASE: MARCH 14, 1983
PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: NINTENDO

PLAYING IT TODAY

The original Game & Watch units made to contain this Mario Bros. game are now over four decades old, which is getting past the point of being "retro" and heading straight toward the status of "antique." A quick search on eBay shows some of them are still in secondhand circulation, but you'd better be prepared to pay a hefty price! Less expensive would be the emulation solution: In recent years Nintendo's whole lineup of Game & Watch titles have been added to the MAME library, so you can play and experience them all on a computer that way. (Games over 40 years old are well past the point of "piracy" being in any way something to fret about.) For a more official solution, though, seek out the Game & Watch Gallery Game Boy games. Mario Bros. appears in both Gallery 4 on GBA and Gallery 3 on GBC – the latter of which has just been added to Nintendo Switch Online through the brand-new Game Boy app!





ORIGINAL RELEASE: NINTENDO 64, DECEMBER 8, 1999 PUBLISHER: NINTENDO DEVELOPER: NOISE

ORIGINAL RELEASE: NINTENDO 64, NOVEMBER 10, 2000 PUBLISHER: NINTENDO DEVELOPER: NOISE

PLAYING THEM BOTH TODAY

While seeking out and importing original cartridges is an option, the easiest way to try out these two titles is to make an extra Nintendo account that has its region set to Japan, then link one of your Switch profiles to that account, log into Japan's eShop and download their version of the N64 NSO app. There's a ton of text, but it's fairly easy to just mash through the story by talking to everyone and always saying "Yes" ("はい") when asked a question. There's also a fan translation of the first game, but it's glitchy and crash-prone!

LOST IN UNTRANSLATION
CUSTOM ROBO & CUSTOM ROBO V2

The American N64 library could've used this pair of bot battlers!

I PROMISED COVERAGE of every Nintendo 64 title that's available to play through Nintendo Switch Online as I introduced this issue, and the Download section reviews got us most of the way there – but we're still missing a pair! As of this writing there are two games that are only available to play through the Japanese version of the N64 NSO app: the original Custom Robo and its immediate sequel, Custom Robo V2.

Unlike some other Lost in Untranslation titles we've profiled in the past, the name Custom Robo shouldn't be entirely foreign to our American audience – two later titles in this series actually did get localized for Stateside release. The first was simply called Custom Robo, and it launched on the GameCube in 2004 – but it was really the fourth entry in the series in Japan (where it was subtitled "Battle Revolution"). We also got the DS game Custom Robo Arena in 2006. Neither of those were received very well, and the series got no further sequels even in Japan after that, so the brand has since fizzled.

Maybe it would've caught on more around the globe if we'd gotten translated versions from the start? The original N64 Custom Robo could've made quite an impact in the system's final years, especially as new releases wound down to make way for the introduction of the GameCube.

Custom Robo, as you could easily guess from its name, was built around battling customizable robots. You take on the role of a young boy who receives his first Custom Robo as a birthday gift – then your best friend quickly ushers you into the world of bot-battling competition. There's a lot of shared DNA with the Pokémon series: leaving home on your birthday to travel the world and battle against other "trainers" on a quest to be the very best. And the story-advancing gameplay is styled like a simple JRPG too: You walk around looking for opponents to fight, and when you win, you earn new robo parts that can be swapped onto your bot's body for use in further battles.

The customization aspect is critical, and certainly in-depth enough to earn its place in the name of the franchise. You can modify five different aspects of your robots: their main body, the gun that they use for their primary attacks, a bomb launcher that serves as a kind of secondary attack, a "pod" on their back that offers a *third* variety of attack and finally their legs, to adjust their mobility both on the ground and in the air.

Finally, once all the part-swapping decisions are finished, the real heart of the game begins: fully 3D robot battles! Two bots face off in obstacle-packed arenas, playing a high-octane game of cat and mouse as each one tries to score clean shots on the other, while simultaneously staying out of range of any counterattacks. It's fast, frantic, fierce and a ton of fun! It's wild to me that Nintendo of America didn't bring this series over immediately, since it would've instantly appealed to players of Pokémon and Super Smash Bros.

There was even an extra multiplayer component: Players could save their custom bot builds to an N64 Controller Pak, then carry that with them over to a friend's house to be able to use their own Robo while playing on the friend's game cartridge. That could've been big, too!

NOA did eventually see the light, as I mentioned, so Custom Robo ultimately got two chances to make a mark in America. But I do think a strong worldwide reception to the original release could've set the series up better for a longer run in all regions! **– LUCAS**

WARP ZONE

What Nintendo Power was writing about way back when.

VOLUME 106 OF Nintendo Power magazine kicked off with an avalanche of coverage for 1080° Snowboarding, including eight pages and a cover story! And like falling snowflakes, each of the other titles featured in this issue brought something unique and different to the table, with Quest 64, Rampage World Tour, NHL Breakaway '98, Quake, NBA In the Zone '98, Mission: Impossible and Yoshi's Story filling out the Fun Machine coverage like so many frozen dinners in your freezer. The last of that lot would also share poster space with Forsaken (not to be confused with Square Enix's recent release, Forspoken). But if you were reading video game magazines in the late '90s and remember ads featuring half a woman's head with a heart tattoo on her cheek against a black-and-white background? Yeah, it's that game.

It's snow business of mine, but if you were more about gaming on the go, then Playing with Portable Power provided a pair of interesting titles this month. Wario started to get a little freaky – well, freakier – in Wario Land II, while Konami brought forth Castlevania Legends: a tale of the original progenitor of the Belmont clan and seeming poster child for the series for a time, Sonia Belmont. However, between her Dreamcast game getting canceled and this title being stricken from the Castlevania canon, poor Sonia's fate has seen her become relegated to the history books. Oh, and like a snowball to the face, Bust-A-Move 2: Arcade Edition managed to sneak up in here, too.

It was also that time once again, as NP named the nominees for the 1997 Nintendo Power Awards! The Super NES and Game Boy were practically afterthoughts, each having their own dedicated platform category, but little other representation elsewhere as next generation titles such as Diddy Kong Racing, Mario Kart 64, GoldenEye 007, Turok, Star Fox 64, Top Gear Rally and others dominated the vote. And by casting their ballot as part of this issue's Player's Poll, Power Players had a chance to win a grand prize of a Nintendo 64 console with four controllers, four Controller Paks, four Rumble Paks and 10 games!

Closing us out, Pak Watch offered a glimpse of future titles such as Ocarina of Time, Turok 2 and Banjo-Kazooie, as well as a little bit of a victory lap for Nintendo over N64 sales achieved thus far.

Volume 107 took it to the hole with cover coverage of Kobe Bryant's NBA Courtside. Fleshing out this issue's Fun Machine Dream Team (not to be confused with the N64 developers) was Deadly Arts, Major League Baseball Featuring Ken Griffey Jr., NFL Blitz, more Quake, 1080° Snowboarding and Iggy's Reckin' Balls (which shared a poster), Wetrix and Virtual Chess 64. And for those taking the tour bus to the next town, there was Mystical Ninja Starring Goemon, Legend of the River King and Ring Rage on the Game Boy.

Elsewhere, Platinum Plays offered tips to score the equivalent of numerous three-pointers across several million-selling Player's Choice titles, while aspiring courtside photographers could read up on Photo Fun with the new Game Boy Camera. And what's April without some fooling around? April News Briefs brought such belly laughs as a review of Hanafuda cards, Luigi 64 news and new releases such as Arcade's Greatest Hits: Chuck E. Cheese Collection, Hanson 64 and Kenny Rogers Rampage 64. This month's Poll winner received a real-life 1080° Snowboarding experience with a Lamar snowboard and private lessons in Whistler, BC!

Finally, while Pak Watch had some interesting previews, none would have the lasting impact of what was to come in the next issue. Check back here next time to catch it all! **– DAVID**

WHAT'S AN OCARINA?

The tentative sub-title for Zelda 64 is Ocarina of Time. An Ocarina, for those of you into musical minutia, is a small, roundish type of flute. In the case of Zelda 64, the Ocarina is a magical instrument, as well. The price of getting the Ocarina is three spiritual stones that Link must find along the way. In other Zelda 64 related news, it has been decided that the Game Pak itself will be gold just like the first NES Legend of Zelda. Although an official date hasn't been announced, Nintendo chairman Howard Lincoln says it will definitely be out some time in the second half of 1998. In the meantime, we have more exclusive shots from EAD.

Link turns away from Amos, then spins and strikes the monster hard. It's the final blow for this armored foe.

The town is one of the most realistic spaces ever created for a video game. Link has complete freedom of motion here.

Even a powerful shot isn't enough to defeat strong enemies like Amos. You need a plan of attack.

Link seems to be able to do just about everything, from throwing a boomerang to reading road signs to Mt. Goron. The statues in the middle will come alive.

Remember the Tektites from the original Zelda? Well, they're back, and hopping mad.

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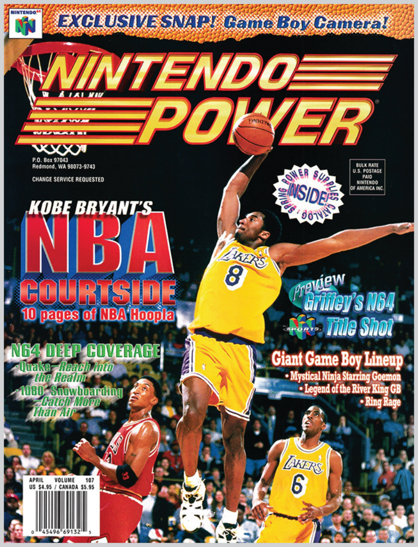


CONTROLLER REVIEW BRAWLER64

Evaluating an alternative input option for your N64 NSO gaming.

PLAYING NINTENDO 64 games on your Switch is a neat idea, but in practice it can be cumbersome. The original Nintendo 64 controller was a unique beast, and while standard Joy-Cons and Pro Controllers do a fairly reasonable job of replicating the experience of using one, their button layouts are far from identical.

Nintendo has their own N64 NSO controller based on the original design that can be purchased directly from them, but not only are they difficult to get, they're still just Nintendo 64 controllers, archaic look and all.

Fortunately, the fine folks at Retro Fighters have modernized the Nintendo 64 controller's design, and they now offer a version for the Nintendo Switch! The Brawler64 was originally released a few years ago as a modern alternative to the N64's controller. (It's shown below.) The newest iteration looks almost identical, but is designed specifically for use with Nintendo Switch Online.

Obviously the biggest difference is the shape. The Brawler64 looks and feels like a modern controller, with a size and weight similar to Nintendo's Pro Controllers, successfully removing the original N64 pad's unusual trident-shaped design that often left players with a third of the controller hanging over their left hands. The build quality is top-notch, even feeling on par with most first-party pads. Where some third-party devices often have a light, almost cheap feeling, these feel solid. The analog sticks have the right amount of resistance to them, the face buttons are nice and responsive . . . it just feels all-around good to use.

Overall it compares favorably to Nintendo's offering, but there are a few areas where the Brawler64 lags slightly behind. The D-Pad is nice enough, but it's not nearly as comfortable or responsive as the original N64 controller. The face buttons also present minor issues: They're a bit taller and have a noticeable amount of extra give compared to official Nintendo controllers, meaning the buttons have to be pressed a bit more thoroughly than you might be used to. It's not a deal-breaker, and it's barely even an issue unless you're directly comparing it to Nintendo's own controllers, but it's still something that anyone looking for that nostalgic feeling would need to get used to.

Every other part, though, shows a marked improvement. The analog stick is thick and has an excellent grip – as opposed to the original's thin plastic "palm ruiner" – and the C Buttons are larger, which makes them feel more usable than they used to.

When you connect the Brawler, you have the option to have it register as a Pro Controller or as the N64 NSO controller, which can be toggled with a button press. When using it as an N64 pad in NSO, it triggers all the same special visuals and sound effects in the N64 app as the official pad, which is a great touch.

Perhaps its biggest advantage is its price and availability: At an MSRP of $44.99, it's less expensive than Nintendo's offering, and it's readily available at various online retailers like Stone Age Gamer or Amazon.

Overall this is a fantastic controller, albeit for a very specific purpose! **– KRIS**

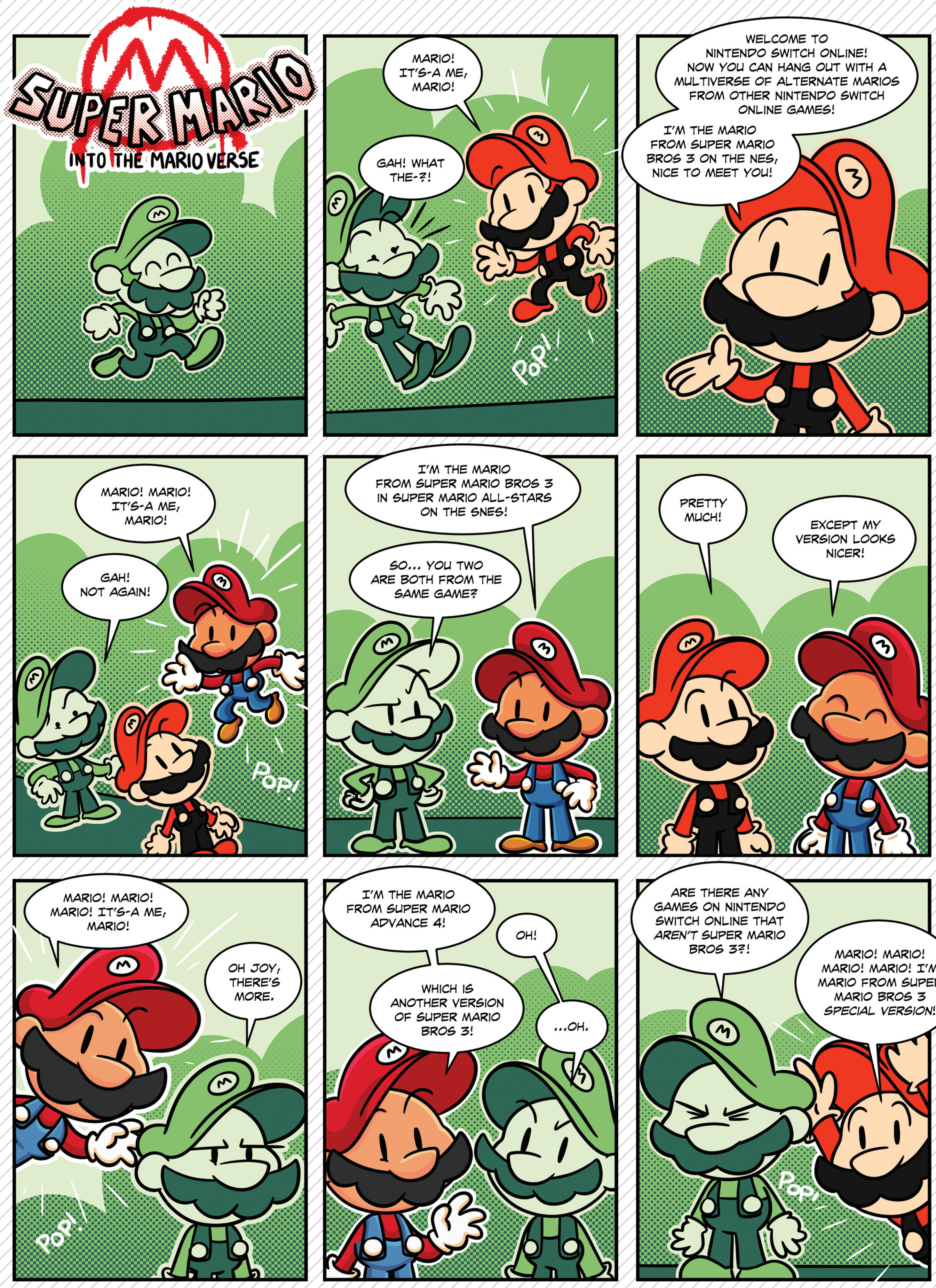
8.5

FUNTASTIC COLORS

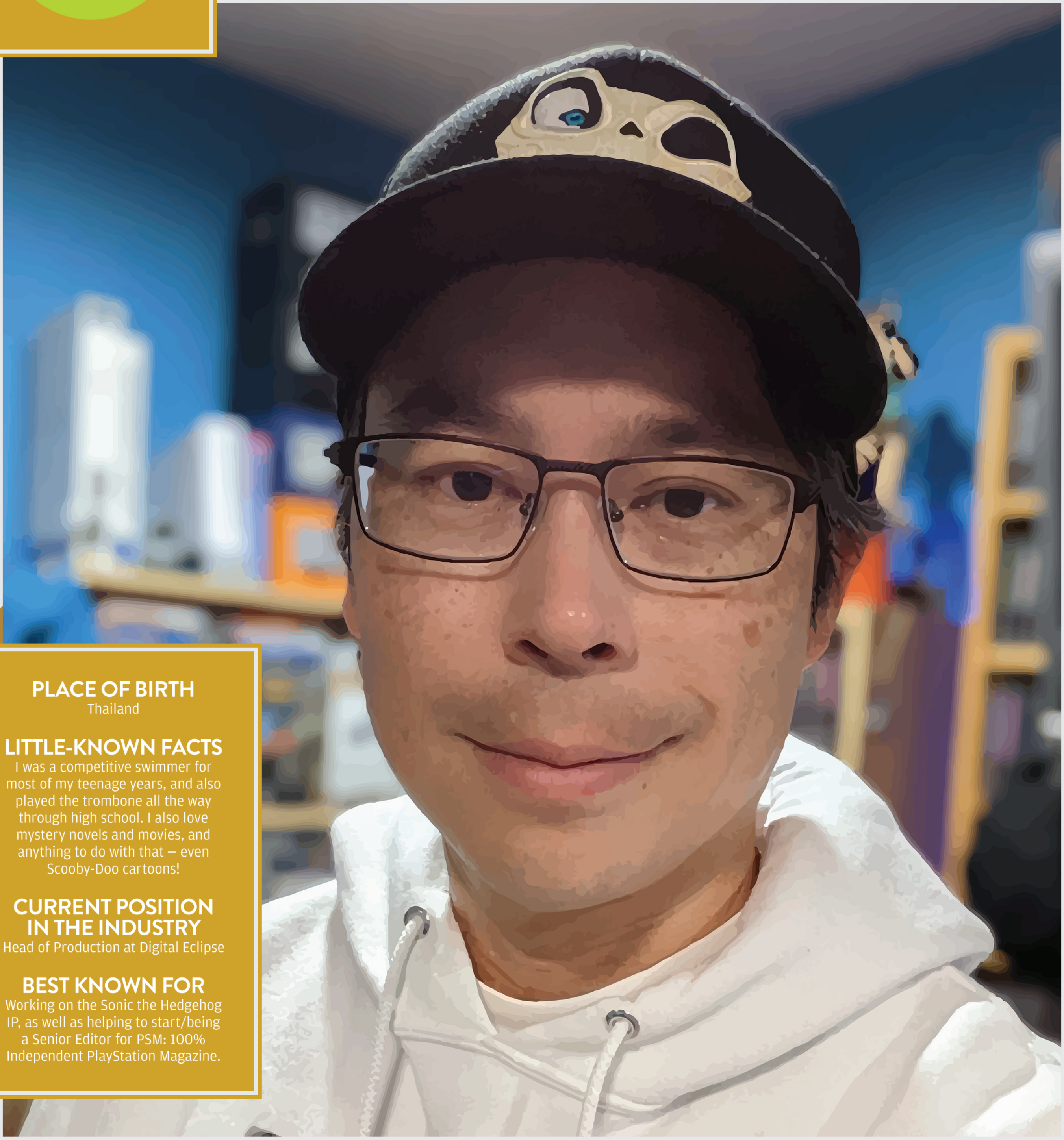
The Brawler64 for Switch is available in Classic Gray, Transparent Blue and Arctic White. The Brawler64 for the original N64, though, has a much more colorful array to choose from! Not only are there options that perfectly match all of the N64's Funtastic series consoles, there are even a few Limited Editions out there like Extreme Green, and the "Ultra Edition" modeled after the Nintendo Ultra 64 prototype!

BLUETOOTH 64?

What about using Bluetooth controllers on your original Nintendo 64? That's where the new BlueRetro Controller Adapter from RetroTime comes in! This device plugs directly into your Nintendo 64's controller port and allows you to connect most modern Bluetooth controllers, including the PS5 DualSense and the Switch Pro Controller, straight to an old N64. And if you're going for a truly authentic experience, Nintendo's N64 NSO controller is fully compatible as well, complete with its built-in rumble. (No need for a Rumble Pak!) Even cooler is that the receiver itself includes four banks of virtual memory, so you don't have to fiddle with the original Controller Pak. And buttons can be remapped too! This little gadget does it all!



BY MATTHEW LOFFHAGEN



PLACE OF BIRTH
Thailand

LITTLE-KNOWN FACTS
I was a competitive swimmer for most of my teenage years, and also played the trombone all the way through high school. I also love mystery novels and movies, and anything to do with that – even Scooby-Doo cartoons!

CURRENT POSITION IN THE INDUSTRY
Head of Production at Digital Eclipse

BEST KNOWN FOR
Working on the Sonic the Hedgehog IP, as well as helping to start/being a Senior Editor for PSM: 100% Independent PlayStation Magazine.

STEPHEN FROST

Working to keep video game history alive through amazingly curated retro collections!

INTERVIEW BY KRIS RANDAZZO

NF: What's the best way to approach creating a retro game collection?
STEPHEN: First off, you have to look at the IP. You have to evaluate what the focus of the IP is. What aspects of the IP are you trying to get across? Or is it not an IP, and it's a company or a person, or things like that? So you have to approach it from that angle first.

And then you have to make a decision on if you're going to focus a collection on games. That would be The Cowabunga Collection, right? Its focus is predominantly on the games: You go into the collection and the first thing you see is games, right? So in that regard, if that's what people know, that's what people are buying. What they want to do initially is jump in and play an old game of Turtles, and any of the behind-the-scenes content is secondary to that.

A second option, which would be Atari 50, is that we're focused on a company or a time period or some higher level component that is not tied to a particular game or IP or franchise. And so that means that your presentation and how you do stuff would be different. In Atari 50, you go in and the first thing you see are the historic timelines, because we feel that representing the company itself is most important.

The third thing would be a feature set. The closest example I could give to that would be Street Fighter 30th, which was the first title I worked on at Digital Eclipse when I came in. The Street Fighter games have been released over and over again on different consoles, so there isn't anything intrinsically new or amazing about the games themselves. It's not like Turtles where people haven't played these games, or a lot of people haven't played them in a long time. People play Street Fighter constantly. They're re-released all the time. So you can't just sell a collection based upon the games. So what we doubled down on were the features. If you go into a lobby, you can choose the game you want to play — and another person can choose the game they want, and it randomly chooses between the two. That's a fun, unique thing. We added training modes, which was amazingly challenging for games that didn't have them originally. All these different features that we wanted to get in there to boost your enjoyment and your experience of playing Street Fighter, and it's not necessarily the games themselves or the history.

I think those are the three main buckets: games, story, features.

For The Cowabunga Collection, how difficult was it to get access to all of those games and behind-the-scenes stuff from Konami?
Working with partners sometimes can be challenging and sometimes it can be great. Konami for us has always been a really good partner, and internally, they've been wanting to do Turtles for a while. But as you can imagine there's a lot of legal hoops to get through — there's Nickelodeon and all the other groups that are involved. And you want to make sure that Kevin Eastman is excited and happy with what you're trying to do, and things like that. Luckily, Konami already did a lot of work before they approached us.

A lot of times these days you get publishers who release collections that only have a handful of games. They have a little bit of behind-the-scenes. But really what it is, is they expect people to pay for them based off of nostalgia and nothing else. So if you don't have the nostalgia for the properties, then it's not going to sell to you. So what we always believe and what Konami also echoes is that, you know, if we're going to do this, we don't want to rest on nostalgia. So even if you haven't played past Turtles games, we want to make sure that we include behind-the-scenes content stuff that helps to convince you *why* you should be interested in the Turtles games. And secondarily, we shouldn't just include five games. Like really, if we're going to do this, we need to include the whole beginning era — or as much of it as possible — and not try to treat it as like, oh, a Volume One and then there's a Volume Two. Konami really wanted to work hard to please their fans.

Let's talk about the player's guides you put together for all the Turtles games. They seem to be very Nintendo Power-inspired.
Nintendo Power definitely was an inspiration. That era of magazines — that feeling of when you'd get an issue in the mail and there'd be a Zelda map in there that you unfold . . . you know, that sort of nostalgic thing. We wanted to replicate the same experience of you laying on your living room floor, sitting in front of your NES and your TV. You've got the manual there. You've got your Nintendo Power there. You've got a bowl of cereal and you're sitting there playing the game and you're looking through the guide and the manual and you're enjoying this experience together. I think that's what was the impetus and the inspiration for these strategy guides.

The game recently got its first major update. Are there more potential updates in the pipeline? And are there any features that you'd still like to add to the game?
We did as much as we could within the constraints of time and the scope of the project. And I think we actually pushed things quite a bit. I'm really proud of that patch. I think it's one of the biggest updates for a collection post-launch that we've ever done.

There is one more patch that will be coming out: an update that has online play for the Manhattan Project NES game in it. That's the second-most requested because we just added online for Turtles in Time for the Super Nintendo. So we're going to add it to Manhattan Project as well.

You've done Ninja Turtles. You did Disney. What other popular '80s or '90s properties would you like to do a collection for? Tiny Toons? Power Rangers? Jurassic Park?
That's always a crazy one because we get hit with stuff all the time. I will share the one that I've always wanted to do, and it would never sell, but it's just a personal thing: I'd like to gather all of the platformer mascots from 8- and 16-bit. So, you know, the Noid and the M.C. Kids and Aero the Acrobat and James Pond and all of those.

You've got a Jaguar emulator. You could emulate the Jaguar Bugsy game!
Yeah! So, getting all of those mascot games in one collection. And it would be an interesting study of some of the failed ones and some of the successful ones. And you know, people might be surprised at how good some of them are! It would've been a pretty fun collection to do, but it would be almost impossible because the amount of different companies who released them, and the owners and things like that, but I think it'd be a very interesting journey through that era of games, to see how licensing impacted those games and which developers actually put forth the effort to make good games outside of the IP. I'd love to work on that at some point in the future. (But it will never happen.)

Shifting focus over to Atari 50, similar to our Konami question, how was it working with Atari? Because Konami has been a pretty constant entity ever since they started making video games, but Atari as a company has changed dramatically over the years. So how hard was it to get your hands on a lot of their stuff?
So it's good and bad. But bad isn't bad in the traditional sense of bad. This is definitely a new generation of Atari. They're new people. They're passionate people. So I think because they're a new sort of "changing of the guard," and Atari has been out of the main limelight for a little while, that they were open to trying something new.

Going into Atari, as you're well aware, their library is very broad and diverse between the arcade games and all the different platforms. We did not have at the start a 100% concrete idea of what games we were going to include. Obviously previous Atari collections included quite a number of games — mostly 2600 games and some arcade stuff. So we didn't know how many games we were going to include. Because of that, we didn't necessarily feel that we were stuck in a particular direction as far as saying it's a games-focused thing like The Cowabunga Collection. And so we eventually started thinking, well, this is the 50th anniversary of Atari. We started thinking about the importance of focusing on the people who built the company. Could we get everyone in to interview? Would that even be possible? There's so many logistics. But once we thought about it and said to each other that it made more sense to focus on the people and the company and its evolution, then we really had to work hard on trying to make that a reality.

And this was even before we knew how we would present it. It was more like, how do we get all the content that we need for this? And so through this sort of learning process that we were going through to figure out how we were going to make this sort of celebration, Atari was very open to all of our ideas. They gave feedback, but they weren't focused or beholden to a particular way of presenting this stuff. They were very receptive to trying different things and trying different ideas, which is something you may not normally get from a formal company that's been around a long time. But with this new team at Atari, they understood what we were trying to figure out. For that, I'm very thankful.

On the negative side, it's been a lot of years. It's been decades since the birth of Atari and a lot of interesting stuff has been lost. Art assets, prototypes, things like that. We had to spend a lot more time going out and trying to partner with people to dig up stuff, flying to different museums and scanning stuff and investigating and reaching out to people who used to work at Atari. There's a lot of legwork.

One of the few criticisms I've seen floating around about Atari 50, which I'm certain you've seen as well, is people saying, "Well, why isn't X game on there?" specifically in regards to the Jaguar library. How much of that library is actually owned by Atari? Were there any games Atari owned for the Jaguar that you had access to that didn't make the cut?
The key thing that I want to stress for this collection is that it was never designed to include every game from every system. It was specifically a curated list. Honestly — and really I don't think this would have floated well — but originally we had talked about only having 50 games to represent Atari in 50 years. But the development of it fluctuated so much, and as we wrote the story and saw the scale of it and how we wanted to split it up, 50 games wasn't going to cut it. So we had to really choose as diverse a palette as possible to try to touch as many genres as we could.

And I think that's what we tried to do on Jaguar too. I think if we had spent more time, we could have gone and got more Jaguar games. But I think the key thing that we were trying to accomplish, or at least I was trying to, is that we try to touch on a bunch of different genres that appear on the Jaguar. So there's a fighting game, there's a pinball game, there's Tempest (which you obviously have to have). There's a driving game. There's all these different genres. So if I were to say, "Hey, I don't know anything about the Jaguar." You can sit down with Atari 50 and play through those games and have a better understanding of all the different genres that appeared on the Jaguar.

The new games that are included in Atari 50 are fantastic. Personally, my favorite is VCTR-SCTR, which takes inspirations from several vector-style arcade classics. The first phase is clearly Asteroids. The second phase is Lunar Lander, and the fourth is Tempest. But what is that third racing segment based on?
It's loosely inspired by BattleZone. Atari no longer has the rights to BattleZone, so we couldn't include it. So instead, this is like a mishmash of some elements of BattleZone. You have the tanks, you have the target reticle, you have the mountains in the background and you're racing into that landscape. I guess the whole tank thing is a little bit off, but it's more about the view. When you're playing that game and you see in the distance you're racing toward those mountains — that's I think where that inspiration comes from.

Gotcha. Ah. Well, thanks for clearing that up! Alright, speaking of the original games, you got the chance to finish off the Swordquest series with Airworld. What was that process like, and how much feedback did you get from the games' original creator?
That was an interesting one because we had a feeling that we sort of wanted to do it, but we weren't sure if we were going to get permission. We weren't sure how Tod Frye was going to feel about it. And so we kind of worked on it a little bit, and then Dave Reese — who was the engineer who worked on it — he did research about what information was shared about Swordquest and what Airworld potentially could have been from any past announcements and what Tod Frye had brought up in the past. And so he thinks he has a good idea of where they would have taken stuff, and so we feel confident that like, OK, we can potentially make something that when you look at it, you're like, OK, this makes logical sense and it feels like it could be an extension of where the other Swordquest games went.

So we presented it to Atari and they're like, "Yeah, this could be OK." Once they saw what we were trying to do, they got more into it and they got into supporting it. But the telling thing was, as part of our interview process, we brought Tod Frye in to be interviewed, and at that point we were going to show him the progress that we had on Airworld. I think most of the team was sort of nervous, but ironically, Dave told me afterward he wasn't nervous at all. And I'm like, "Wow, that's crazy." You're about to show a game that you're making to the original creator of the previous games and hopefully that you're taking in a direction that he would have wanted, or is accepting of. He's like, "Yeah, I guess I didn't really think about it like that. It's just like I was. I was really passionate about it. I was working on it. I was really proud of it, so I was just glad to show it to people." And fortunately, Tod came in and he saw it and he loved it. He's like, "Yeah, I can see where you took this logically." We have these great photos of him playing the game and smiling, and so it worked out in that regard.

This is our 64th issue of Nintendo Force, and we've put a big focus on that platform in this edition. How would you feel about doing some sort of Nintendo 64 collection, and what games from the N64 library would you like to tackle?
I do think that, for a lot of people, the N64 is hit or miss. You have people who are very passionate about it, and some people who are not. I actually enjoy the N64. I think there's a variety of good games I still like.

My first time seeing Super Mario 64 and playing it was when I was on a trip. I got flown to California for an interview at Imagine Media — which became Future US who eventually published Nintendo Power — and they flew me in to interview me to be a writer. And it just so happened that the day I arrived was the day after they had gotten the Japanese N64 with Mario 64! So during the whole interview, I'm looking out the window of the office and Mario 64 is just idling there on a TV. No one's playing it, but it's sitting there and like, oh my God. I'm just trying not to be distracted, and at the end of it, I had a few hours before I had to fly back and I asked, "Can I just sit and play Mario 64?" And they're like, "Yeah, go ahead."

Ha!
Chris Slate — who was the E.I.C. of PlayStation Magazine when I worked there — he was a good friend of mine back then. He was a huge Nintendo fan, so he had stayed up from the moment they got it. All night long. He just hadn't gone home until like, I don't know, 7:00 in the morning. He had played it constantly. So that was my first exposure, and it was a magical moment for me.

And also, Ocarina of Time is still one of my all-time favorite games, period. Those two are very magical. People resonate with Super Mario 64 and Ocarina of Time. They were magical moments for me.

Same here. 100%.
To this day, even just for those two games and maybe Beetle Adventure Racing, the system is magical from that perspective. And you know, there's such a nice collection of games that I love, like the Rush games, the Hydro Thunders, the Turoks . . . there's so many IPs that were great on that system. So if I were do an N64 collection, I wouldn't know what I would focus on. You know what I mean? But what I would love to do is to be able to present those N64 games without the molasses smoothing filter. Just having them cleaned up. My N64 is modded to turn that filter off, and I just appreciate games better that way. I think the games just look a bit crisper.

But you'd have to be selective. It's the same thing with Atari because some of the stuff doesn't age super well. Like even GoldenEye is a product of its time. I really enjoyed it, but when I played through it again recently, it's rough. The look of stuff, the collision — it could get frustrating. I also love the Rare games, like Banjo-Kazooie and Donkey Kong 64 (before they went mad with so much collectable stuff). But even to this day, I really love those. So anything that copies that now, like A Hat in Time and Yooka-Laylee or things like that, those are very much what I consider N64-era platformers. They all have a special place.

I love action platformers especially like that, like Sphinx — games that are structured like they would be an N64 game, especially during the Rare era. So I love anything that even remotely resembles that kind of experience.

So I'd love to do a platformer kind of collection because I think those could still resonate well, but from an N64 perspective, I just don't know what path you would go down. Obviously doing a history of Nintendo thing would be phenomenal for that, but outside of that, from a third-party perspective, what would it be?

I also love your idea for platformers, so collecting stuff like Rocket: Robot on Wheels, Tonic Trouble, Buck Bumble . . . but again, who owns those and how do you get those mashed together?
Or Mischief Makers! Yeah, there's a lot of great stuff out there, but it's all like, separated out. It's hard to connect them all, you know what I mean?

If you could do a collection of N64 AKI wrestling games, that would be killer. I don't even like wrestling, and I thought those games were fun.
I'd be curious how, especially for people who've passed, at this point what the likeness rights are.

Finally, if you could have any super power, what would it be, and why?
I do think — and it's a little bit cheesy — but I do think flying is pretty cool. Like the sensation of being able to fly on your own would be kind of magical — like the sense of freedom and being able to do stuff and travel from point to point would be kind of cool. So in a cheesy way, I guess flying.

[EDITOR'S NOTE: Kris and Stephen had a truly epic talk! We've fit all we can into these pages, but visit our YouTube channel for the extended interview!]

BY JOHN-CHARLES HOLMES

Before the Nintendo 64 . . .
before any Nintendo video games at all . . .
there was Atari! Let's pay respect to the
games that paved the way for Nintendo's
rise to fame with a full review of
Atari 50: The Anniversary Collection!

The Legacy of the Atari 2600

ATARI 50: THE ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: DIGITAL ECLIPSE RATING: T

IT WOULD BE easy to mistake Atari 50: The Anniversary Celebration for something that's been done to death dozens of times before. Game compilations are hardly uncommon, and Atari collections date all the way back to the Super NES. But writing off Atari 50 as a mere game compilation would be a bigger mistake than a landfill full of E.T. cartridges! As its title suggests, this isn't just a collection, it's a celebration, and one whose measure lies in more than just the quality of the games included. Many of the over 100 titles gathered in Atari 50 may not necessarily seem worthy of a celebration, but when presented as a part of a larger collective they take on new meaning. The name of the game here is context, and that is where Atari 50 shines brightest.

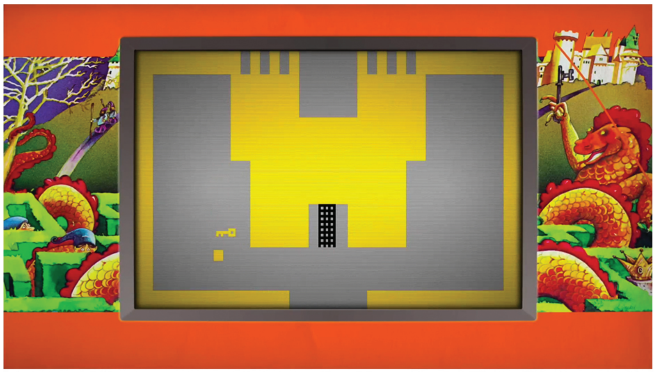
Normally when you boot up a game compilation, you're greeted by a menu of some sort that lists the games that you can play. In Atari 50, you're greeted instead with an interactive timeline. This breaks down Atari's 50-year history with incredibly detailed document scans, old video footage and brand-new interviews with the people who actually made Atari what it was.

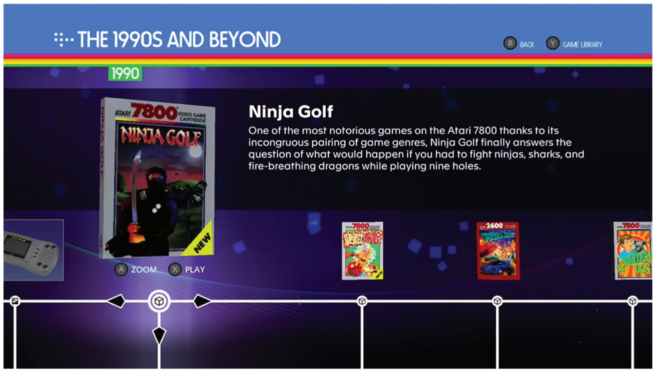
Everything is divided into five distinct eras, the third of which, Highs and Lows, showcases another part of what makes Atari 50 so unique: It doesn't simply focus on Atari's successes, but its failures as well. Here you'll hear stories about the mistakes Atari made that directly led to the famous game industry crash, told both by the people who made many of them, and the ones who tried in vain to stop it. From Pong to the Jaguar to the evergreen homebrew scene and even Atari's new VCS console, it's all here, good and bad.

The level of detail in each of these timelines is exquisite, but what truly elevates them is the collection's overall presentation. Sound designer Bob Baffy has done remarkable work here in creating something that not only emits sounds and songs that elicit feelings of being in a real museum, but combines them with something that can only be described as "uniquely Atari." Everything – every sound, every image, every work in every menu – is deliberate. Box art moves subtly, game descriptions are full of personality and everything from masterpieces like Tempest 2000 to borderline disasters like Fight for Life are treated with the utmost respect.

Most game compilations, even ones from Digital Eclipse, would have included all this in the bonus features, but Atari games are a special case. Many of these titles are so old that newer players might easily shrug them off as not worth playing. This approach of presenting them as an interactive documentary on the history of Atari changes that – it makes playing every single game in the collection worth your time, even if only for a few seconds. To further incentivise exploration, every item on the timeline that you interact with gets "completed" like a checklist. Complete it all, and you unlock a special reward.

Which brings me to the classic games themselves, almost all of which are available right out of the gate. A handful of titles can be unlocked by completing various tasks throughout the experience, but the vast majority are available in a separate menu straight away. So if you want to skip the timeline and jump right into the action, it's nice and easy. The library presented here is a bit of a mixed bag, but one with a purpose. The goal of this collection wasn't necessarily to offer as many games as could be stuffed into one package, but instead to curate an interactive museum exhibit that shows what each platform was capable of in various genres. This is why there are a number of familiar games missing from Atari 50 that do appear in other collections like Atari Flashback Classics for Switch. Still, while it may seem absurd to complain





about a collection that contains over 100 games, inevitably if you're an Atari fan there's going to be something you wished was here that didn't make the cut.

Of course many of those stem from licensing issues beyond anyone's control, which is something that really hurts this collection from both a nostalgic and historical perspective. Some of Atari's most defining games are unfortunately off-limits to the current iteration of the company. Atari may have published Space Invaders, Pac-Man and even Nintendo's own Mario Bros. on Atari 2600, but they don't own those brands themselves. Historically significant licensed fare like Superman, Indiana Jones, Star Wars and the dreaded E.T., or many of Atari's own arcade hits like Paperboy, Battlezone and Gauntlet, are absent due to the endless stream of complicated company changes and licenses Atari worked with over the years.

But while these missing games are a huge blow, what is here is presented with the level of technical excellence that fans have come to expect from Digital Eclipse. Games look and feel as good as they possibly can, with creative ways of making titles with unconventional control schemes workable in a number of ways, including clever use of the Switch's touchscreen.

Now, all of that would be more than enough to justify Atari 50's existence, but there's still more! In addition to the interactive timeline and mountain of classics, there's also a handful of brand-new retro-themed games included. These are arguably one of this collection's biggest selling points, as they're all both fun to play and absolutely fascinating. There's a total of six "new" games inspired by Atari classics. Haunted Houses is an amusingly goofy updated take on the Atari 2600 classic Haunted House. Neo Breakout is, as you might expect, an updated version of Breakout that includes Battle Breakout, an awesome multiplayer cross between Breakout and Pong.

Quadratank is another multiplayer bonanza that combines elements from Atari's arcade classic Tank and the 2600 game Combat, and Yars' Revenge Enhanced is a complete visual overhaul of the original Yars' Revenge for 2600.

For me, the real showstoppers are Swordquest: Airworld and VCTR-SCTR. Swordquest was originally conceived as a massive four-part multimedia event back in the '80s with real gold- and jewel-encrusted prizes, comic book tie-ins and more. The series famously never finished, though, with only its first three chapters ever seeing release. The folks at Digital Eclipse got the opportunity to actually create Airworld based on the original design documents, complete with personal approval from Swordquest's creator Tod Frye!

Meanwhile, VCTR-SCTR is a killer love letter to classic vector arcade games. You play through a rapid succession of games inspired by Lunar Lander, Asteroids, Battlezone and Tempest in a bid to survive as long as possible and rack up high scores. This one also includes a completely insane co-op mode where two ships have to get as far as they can while tethered together. It's a blast!

All this is to say that Atari 50 isn't just another collection of some dusty old games. It features the first commercial re-releases of several Lynx and Jaguar titles. It's got arcade and console games that have never been ported to any other platforms before. There's hours of content to pour through in the interactive timeline, and countless gameplay and display options from arcade dip switches to CRT filters. Everything here is so obviously collected and presented by a team that has nothing but the highest level of reverence for the source material, and a company that sees the value in showcasing its failures as proudly as its successes. This perfect storm came together to create a collection that truly deserves to call itself a "celebration," and has without a doubt raised the bar for what a classic game compilation can be. If you're a longtime Atari fan, you might feel slightly let down by the selection, but I promise you've never seen these games presented in quite this way before.

If you've never played an Atari game, there's no better place to start. No video game company could have possibly asked for a better celebration of their history, and with any luck this is just a first step in larger things to come from both Atari and Digital Eclipse. Atari 50: The Anniversary Celebration is a masterpiece, and everyone who has any interest in the history of the video game industry owes it to themselves to give it a go.
– KRIS

Back on the Battlefield

FIRE EMBLEM ENGAGE

I'M A RELATIVE newcomer to the Fire Emblem franchise, having only played the original NES version's 2020 English localization, as well as Three Houses and Three Hopes. But based on my limited experience, I think Fire Emblem Engage is a fantastic blend of the flashiness of modern titles with the strategic in-depth battle action that's defined the series since the '90s.

The awakening of Alear, child of the Divine Dragon, after a thousand-year slumber, would normally be a joyous occasion, but instead it's heralding the return of Sombron, the Fell Dragon. Engage wastes no time in getting into the gravity of the situation, as tragedy strikes and Alear and their allies must now unite the 12 Emblem Rings, scattered throughout the world of Elyos, in order to awaken their power and defeat Sombron. These Emblems are the spirits of heroes of previous Fire Emblem titles — Marth, Roy, Ike, Leif, Celica, Sigurd and others — some of whom make their first appearance in a Western title. We get a good sense of their personalities and motivations in their sidequests (which gives me hope that we'll see some of the older Japan-only games make their way westward as well).

The first thing I loved about Engage was how colorful everything was. Three Houses' characters had Technicolor hair and eye colors, but they couldn't set off Garreg Mach's drabness. For the beautiful environments and sheer variety of character designs, Engage has them beat, especially in the fashion department.

You've got Céline, the princess of Firene, who looks like a Fabergé egg while slinging spells in battle; Timerra, princess of Solm, who has colorful baubles all over her flashy desert garb; Alear's steward Vander, who looks intimidating in both his butler's suit and his shining armor . . . and the undisputed champion of cuteness, Rosado. I love it when artists who don't normally work in games are able to lend their talents to designing video game characters, and when the results get translated to the screen so well! I would say this is on par with how Akira Toriyama's designs for Chrono Trigger and Dragon Quest came to life.

While everyone has their specialized skills, I found some characters being pushed to the background as more capable characters made their appearances, while others were just not as interesting. I appreciated that everyone had a "set" character class and skill tree, instead of using training or classes to mold characters into a role they may not be designed for, like in Three Houses. Out of the new character classes introduced, my favorite was the Wolf Knight. It's a speedy class that uses both swords and daggers, and you ride into battle mounted on a giant wolf. (Yes, Merrin, that's *totally* cool.) I also appreciated that characters could level up and inherit Emblem Ring skills outside of battle.

Along with the Emblem Rings, there are also Bond Rings, which are drawn from a gacha and give smaller buffs to characters depending on the ring's rank. The more varieties of rings you collect, the more you learn about the character they represent, reminding me of trading cards. (As soon as I recruited Byleth, I went to create his Bond Rings, and it was bittersweet to see that Ferdinand was one of the Three Houses characters represented.)

Where Engage really shines is combat: Characters now move themselves on the field (you can still select squares for them to auto walk to), the combat animations are fluid and impactful and the critical hit animations are much more advanced than the ones in previous titles. With the return of the series' classic Weapon Triangle also comes a new strategic wrinkle: Hitting or being hit by a weapon that's strong against yours puts you into Break status, leaving you not only unable to counterattack, but open to additional attacks from speedier enemies. Not only that, but there are also Smash attacks, which are powerful attacks that strike last and push the target away from you. Some of the later maps also introduce AOE attacks that need to be avoided in specific ways, whether it's getting out of the line of fire or strategic positioning of your units in advance.

SWITCH PUBLISHER: NINTENDO
DEVELOPER: INTELLIGENT SYS.
RATING: T

For those of you playing Engage after experiencing the sheer depth of Three Houses' social development, there's not a lot of opportunities for characters to develop social bonds with each other here. If you purchase the DLC, it adds some additional social bonding functions, but other than that, there's only one mealtime opportunity per trip from the world map to the Somniel – not a whole lot of time to spend relationship building.

Engage is designed more for the player who enjoys grinding for levels and gold than pairing characters with each other, which is why I felt the story pacing was a little inconsistent as well: The beginning and end were a rush of action and development, while the middle was a lot less urgent. I really liked the villainous group, especially after their motives and the true nature of one of their number was revealed – it added a new complexity to the story, as well as a new motivation for Alear.

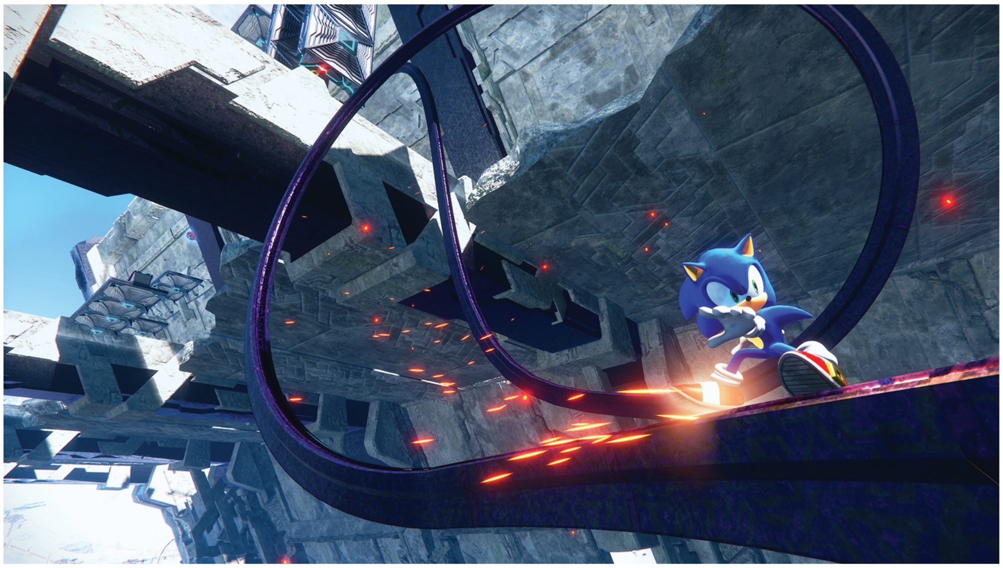
Ironically, I thought the villains had the most character development of anyone.

While there are a lot of minigames you can play around the Somniel – a rhythm-based one that gives your character buffs in battle, a flying "break the targets" game and a fishing game – I only really played the fishing one because it was the only one that felt useful in some way. I did enjoy playing with the doglike Sommie, and it was adorable to watch it running around behind you, and jump up after it lies down on its back for a nap when Alear is idle.

My biggest problem with the storytelling was that while most of the 3D animated cutscenes are excellent, some of them fall flat. In one cutscene, an antagonist is holding the family member of a main character hostage and threatening to kill them . . . but since it's done using the game's engine, there's no tension or sense of danger whatsoever. It's just one character, standing in front of another character, yelling and gesturing while the other character just quietly stands alone, with no guards flanking them, no blade at their throat or destructive spell at the ready. There's no reason why this couldn't have been portrayed using still pictures instead. Another peculiarity I noticed was that when it came to physical violence during cutscenes, nothing was ever directly shown – the screen fades out, you hear the punch or slap, then fade in on the aftermath. It's probably due to software rating reasons, but it's still weird.

It may not have as hard a grip on my heart as Three Houses does, but Fire Emblem Engage is an essential title for tactical RPG fans. Veterans and newcomers alike will both find this title . . . engaging! **– REBECCA**

8.5



SWITCH PUBLISHER: SEGA DEVELOPER: SONIC TEAM RATING: E10+

The Blue Blur's Wide World

SONIC FRONTIERS

THOUGH HE CLAIMS to be the "Fastest Thing Alive," Sonic the Hedgehog has been unable to keep pace with gaming's evolution since his 3D debut nearly 25 years ago. Each major outing has been criticized for the same gameplay and technical shortcomings, none of which were properly remedied in subsequent titles. Not even one-off gimmicks like the Werehog transformation or custom Avatars could dig the Blue Blur out of his rut.

Sonic Frontiers marks the most honest attempt in a long while to shake up that formula. Director Morio Kishimoto and his crew aimed to deliver a fresh experience that eschewed traditional level progression in favor of a free-form structure endearingly described as "Open Zone" rather than open world. However, conveying this new direction has proven difficult – remember the muted responses to that first IGN preview? That's because Frontiers is at its heart a collectathon platformer – think less Breath of the Wild and more Super Mario Odyssey.

The main goal on all but one of the five Starfall Islands that Sonic and pals have been marooned upon is to collect the seven Chaos Emeralds, then defeat the massive Titan that serves as the area's big boss. To remove the Chaos Emeralds from their altars, you must acquire the requisite number of Vault Keys . . . awarded by clearing Cyber Space levels . . . accessed via Portals . . . unlocked by collecting Portal Gears . . . earned by defeating the Guardians that roam the land. Some Emeralds are only available after chatting with the incorporeal specters of Amy, Knuckles or Tails, and those conversations can only be triggered by collecting enough Memory Tokens. And now imagine dropping into Frontiers without any of this advance notice!

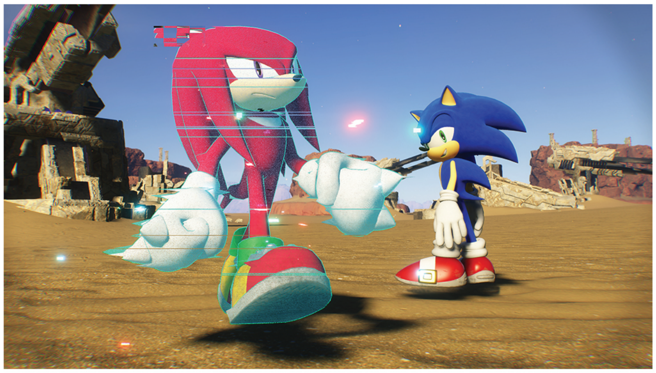
Compounding the absence of proper guidance are a bevy of all-too-familiar Sonic roadblocks, like a lack of momentum that causes Sonic to abruptly stop once you ease off the control stick, homing targets that he can't lock onto properly . . . and pop-in. Ooooooh, the pop-in! Some of the worst on the Switch! You'll be looking up at rails suspended in the sky, affixed to seemingly nothing, then a set of floating platforms will phase into existence only once you're standing directly beneath them!

These are all the ingredients for another mediocre 3D Sonic gumbo. But while I wouldn't blame anyone for dropping Frontiers after those meandering early hours, my advice would be . . . keep going! Trust me! It gets better!

The moment Frontiers finally clicked for me arrived upon returning to the game after having bounced off it for a month. I decided to clear the remaining Challenges – short activities like jumping rope or inflicting a set amount of damage on a training dummy within a time limit – in order to fill in the blank spaces of the in-game map. Doing so revealed the locations of 100 or so additional Memory Tokens, and because I'm such a neat freak, I figured I'd clean up the clutter before continuing onward.

The simple yet fulfilling gameplay loop that followed involved dropping pins on the map, tracing a logical path from the ground to my now-glowing Token targets and then conquering the obstacle courses that lay before me. Springs, rails to grind, lines of Rings to Light Speed Dash through and other trademark hazards made for some brisk platforming snacks that required quick reflexes and a keen eye for unusual arrangements of structures and enemies. Sometimes I could even skip the "correct" path by launching off of a rocky outcropping, taking to the air and claiming those glowing baubles in alternative fashion. Satisfied with my small victory, I would then promptly scan the horizon for my next prize.

Those elements of past 3D Sonic ventures, once derided as flash over function, have been repurposed as tools for the sake of exploration and



7.0

discovery. Gone is the exhausting rollercoaster ride that propels you toward the finish line at all costs, and in its place is a relaxed, reflective afternoon jog in which the destination can be whatever you desire. Once I realized that, I felt liberated!

Of course, should you desire the classic linear boost gameplay, Cyber Space levels can tickle those urges. These levels – available in Green Hill, Chemical Plant, Sky Sanctuary and generic highway flavors, with EDM sprinkles on top – are compact and breezy compared to courses in previous adventures, to the point that the S-rank time targets likely won't present a problem for even casual players (except in 1-2, bizarrely).

Another compelling facet of Frontiers is something almost entirely absent from Sonic games in general: actual character development! In addition to the aforementioned plot-progressing convos, there are plenty of optional dialogue scenes that help flesh out Sonic's relationships. You have Amy Rose, no longer the lovesick harpy of the past, now much more mellow and introspective. Then there's Tails, hoping to become his own person outside of Sonic's shadow.

Meanwhile, Eggman gets some growth of his own thanks to the new character Sage, an AI he designed to study the technology of the Starfall Islands. Though she begins as an emotionless facsimile of Neon Genesis Evangelion's Rei Ayanami – voiced by Rei's English and Japanese voice actresses no less! – her inquisitiveness and humor gradually reshape the bond between her and her creator to that of parent and child. And the real kicker is that this development feels natural and heartwarming! (Hats off to Archie and IDW Sonic comic lead writer Ian Flynn for infusing Frontiers with a welcome level of depth only possible by someone of his extensive expertise!)

Eventually you'll engage the Titans, starting with a Shadow of the Colossus-style climb onto their domes before segueing into Super Sonic beatdowns that unfold like a shonen anime! Wave farewell to the somber piano accompaniments of island exploration; say hello to blood-pumping heavy metal anthems that go way harder than they have any right to! There are four of these Titan brawls, each with the scope and excitement of a final boss, that require different puzzle-like approaches to lower their defenses and are peppered with slick quick-time events that reward you with delicious payoffs. Bombastic yet thematically appropriate for a game about taking the journey at your own pace and only throttling into high gear as punctuation.

Combat against Titans, as well as the rest of the robotic island defenders, brings us to Frontiers' weakest contributions. While Sonic starts off with his basic Homing Attack, he can learn new abilities after acquiring enough Skill Points. Sadly, aside from the cool pizzazz these techniques exude, they don't possess any additional application that would make any one a better fit in specific scenarios. You'll likely just lean into a favorite pick – the long-range Sonic Boom is my preference – and spam your way to victory.

Speaking of upgrades, the item economy is busted. You could meticulously scavenge colored seeds to boost your attack and defense, rescue enough not-Korok Kocos to raise your max speed and Ring counts and earn those Cyber Space-bestowing Vault Keys the proper way. Or . . . you could go fishing with Big the Cat, exchange your catches for Treasure Tokens, then bulk buy literally every item crucial to advancing the story and Sonic's attributes. It's actually possible to bypass nearly every Cyber Space level, as well as the Guardian battles, simply by vibing to lo-fi beats to relax/fish to!

Honestly, I'm impressed the game allows such a degree of freedom that you can just ignore massive chunks that rub you the wrong way. That's not possible 100% of the time, unfortunately. There are several points during which you're forced into a momentum-killing ordeal, like suddenly playing pinball to earn an astronomical high score, or *(SPOILERS AHEAD)* reaching the true final boss and discarding all the skills you've honed because now you're playing a shmup with mechanics ripped straight from Ikaruga! *(END OF SPOILERS)*

Sonic Frontiers is a brave experiment that struggles to express its intentions while still committing many of its series' 3D sins. But if you're able to commit to learning its idiosyncrasies, you'll discover a fun, addictive journey unlike any in Sonic's past. And if Sega wants him to flourish once more, it'll commit to refining the Open Zone format instead of trashing it like all of his past gimmicks! **– TONY**

The Rumored Remaster, Revealed

METROID PRIME REMASTERED

THREE FOR THREE!

Four years ago, in our March/April 2019 issue, we ran a trio of Rumors pages at the end of the Previews section. We'd never done it before and haven't done it again since, but the whispers about the three games were just so loud that they all seemed like sure things! Sure enough, Skyward Sword HD did descend on the Switch in 2021. Then Persona 5 finally made its debut (in Royal form) in 2022. Finally, at long last, the remastered version of Metroid Prime that industry insiders have teased Nintendo fans with for over four years now has finally been confirmed.

And it instantly went on sale! It was revealed to officially exist during the February 8 Nintendo Direct, then shadowdropped into the eShop immediately after that presentation. Wowza!

Even though this game's existence may have been one of Nintendo's all-time worst-kept secrets, I'm still shocked at what I've seen while playing it. Because this is no quick-and-dirty upscaled port like so many of us anticipated! It is a meticulously revisualized masterpiece of a port. It is breathtakingly beautiful.

Metroid Prime first launched on the GameCube in 2002, then came to the Wii with some slightly bumped-up visuals and a new style of play control in 2009. Both of those versions hold up to this day — Prime looked great from the start, and still does in all of its forms.

But this Switch remaster is on a whole 'nother level. Every visual asset has been revisited, with 3D models getting all-new geometry to be more polygonally complex, while every 2D texture wrapping around those models has been remade and given wildly increased fidelity as well. It's stunning.

GAMECUBE TO SWITCH: A BEFORE & AFTER COMPARISON

In order to fully appreciate the incredible amount of extra detail that Retro Studios (as well as several different contributing studios) poured into Remastered, you should seek out a direct comparison video on YouTube. Rose-tinted glasses will have your memory painting a prettier picture of Prime as it looked in 2002, but seeing the GameCube version head-to-head against the Switch's stunner will open your eyes to the reality! Printed here is just one example of a moment that especially amazed me: Bosses like the gigantic plant beast Flaahgra have been given a new level of detail that I know returning players will truly appreciate! Samus' helmet HUD has been enhanced as well, while the widescreen field of view lets you take in more of the scenery at once than before. It's wonderful!

Metroid Prime Remastered looks so good that it nearly makes me mad! Because Nintendo's set a new high bar for what a remaster can be with this release, and now I just know that I'll be shaking my head in frustration for years to come when future re-releases of other classics aren't given nearly this much effort. Alas!

Perhaps this game was granted this great a degree of time and effort for a full visual makeover because of just how special it remains underneath all the glitz and glamour. Metroid Prime was a masterpiece before this version – its gripping gameplay, unmatched sense of immersion and expertly crafted world design have been making unbelievers into fully fledged Metroid fans for two decades straight.

Prime was Samus' first 3D mission. It brilliantly shifted the series from sidescrolling to a first-person view with the genius idea of putting the player's eyes inside of Samus' helmet, using the inner surface of her visor as a heads-up display to keep track of her health, missile count, active beam weapon and more. You played as Samus in earlier Metroids; in Prime, you fully suited up and became her.

SWITCH PUBLISHER: NINTENDO
DEVELOPER: RETRO STUDIOS
RATING: T

Being Samus means being a butt-kicking action hero in combat scenes, but also an investigative explorer in moments when enemies aren't in your face. Metroid Prime tells the story of the planet Tallon IV and its struggles to overcome an alien poison seeping into its environment – and you get that tale told to you bit by bit through Samus' use of her Scan Visor to fully examine her surroundings. I'm sure some players ignore that and just blitz through – Metroid is the original speedrunning series, after all – but I personally adore taking my time and scanning everything in sight, drinking in all the lore the game has to give.

. . . Which brings us back to how beautiful this remaster is. I've played through Prime several times over the last 20 years and nothing about it is too new to me – but it still felt totally fresh playing through and seeing it all again on Switch. This run was like a sightseeing tour for me. I stepped into each new room and corridor and just marveled at the great new detail to be seen on every surface!

And not a single room was ignored. There are some small alcoves and tiny chambers that you'll spend *maybe* 30 seconds inside during a normal Prime playthrough – every one of them has been painstakingly remade. I'm awed.

While the visual overhaul got the bulk of the attention from the developers here, their work on the play control is praiseworthy as well. A new dual stick control scheme was made for this remaster, and I instantly gravitated toward it. It feels so smooth! You can glide through rooms and rotate Samus' aim independently, which wasn't always the case. If you prefer older control styles, though, they're all supported – even the Wii version's IR pointer controls, with a Joy-Con substituting for the Wiimote of yesteryear.

Even gyro aiming made the cut! Any Splatoon players out there should appreciate that – I turned it on myself for a few battles that called for faster, freer aiming. (There are a few foes who can't be locked onto with Samus' normal aim assist, for instance.) But I mostly stuck with the dual sticks.

In going back to touch up this great game, though, there are a few little things I might've suggested to change, had I been in the room. The weapon-coded doors, for one. Metroid Prime involves a lot of backtracking, so you'll go through many of the same doors more than once. Why, after I've first opened a door that requires, say, the Ice Beam, do I then have to always switch back to the Ice Beam again when reopening that same door?

I mean, I already proved I own the Ice Beam. Shouldn't all doors like that just switch to "any beam is good" after they're opened the first time? It would remove an issue. A *minor* issue, I know. But that's just how good this game is – I'm having to stretch to find anything negative to say about it! It's nearly uncomplainable!

The complaints will come, though. They'll come when Nintendo does something like roll out Prime 2 & 3 as simple ports rather than remasters. They'll come when Nintendo drops another low-effort compilation like Super Mario 3D All-Stars. Everyone will say, "Come on, Nintendo! What happened to the level of effort you gave to Metroid Prime Remastered!?"

Well, bring on the whining. Because this game deserves to be the new high-water mark against which all other Nintendo re-releases will be compared for years to come.

– LUCAS

10

The Treasure Hunt is On!

DRAGON QUEST TREASURES

LIKE THE KIRBY series, Dragon Quest has enjoyed enough releases through its life that even its spinoffs have developed a fanbase. So when a follow-up to the Game Boy's Dragon Quest Monsters was announced, a number of players were eager to see what was cooking. As Dragon Quest Treasures ultimately ended up evolving into something quite a bit different, does it still carry the series' pedigree well?

Prior to the events of Dragon Quest XI, a younger Erik and his sister Mia find themselves spirited away to the distant realm of Draconia. Comprised of the remnants of two enormous dragons in the sky, Draconia is a land rife with treasure, and it's up to the kids to find it before treacherous rival bands of pirates do!

To that end, Erik and Mia can enlist the aid of a variety of Dragon Quest monster mainstays to join their team and help them in their journey. These monsters will be the main muscle of your group, controlled by the AI and smashing other foes with reckless abandon. The kids can deliver a simple flurry of swipes with their daggers, but this generally does very little damage, so your handheld catapult is the best option for combat. Like Link's own slingshot, Erik and Mia will enter a sort of first-person mode to aim their pellets at targets. While this can be used to strike weak points on enemies, there's a huge variety of pellets in the game and you can use them in a manner similar to a support character: debuffing foes, buffing allies, restoring HP, using elemental attacks, etc.

Truth be told, the combat is still fairly straightforward and not terribly satisfying, since your monsters will be largely dealing much of the damage. The real highlight of Dragon Quest Treasures' gameplay is its explorative elements. Bouncing off a Slime or gliding atop a Hades Condor feels great, and all of the large, intricately designed areas are full of interesting nooks and crannies. It's a world that lacks invisible walls and has multiple solutions for getting around, which makes the act of loot-hunting all the more satisfying. Unfortunately, you're limited to three monsters per excursion, and each can only hold a few treasures for you, so you'll inevitably come up to points where you're lacking access to an ability that would let you explore properly. This limitation makes sense in the early game, but it becomes frustrating later on when you desire a way to more efficiently bring in valuables.

The treasures themselves are overwhelming in their variety: Over 700 Smash Bros.-style statues largely spanning the entire Dragon Quest series await, and each has its own description and game of origin mentioned. You'll find brand-new models of fan-favorite characters like Terry and Angelo, as well as obscure inside jokes such as a chunk of the busted wall that Princess Alena kicked through in Dragon Quest IV. As a huge fan of the series, I found these collectables to be quite the treasures indeed, and they motivated me to collect as many as possible for those delightful "I remember that!" moments. Granted, your mileage may vary depending on your familiarity with Dragon Quest.

That said, the models are visually modest despite their charming nature, which reflects on the game's graphics as a whole. DQ's Akira Toriyama-penned art style looks as great as ever, but there's a lack of detail in the environments. Everything comes across as quite a bit flatter than DQXI due to a lack of rich textures or effects. On the plus side, the animal-based visual design of the world has some spectacular moments, like exploring inside a deceased dragon's gargantuan jaws. Glancing up and seeing rows of giant stalactite "teeth" on the horizon has a Xenoblade-like effect of conveying a real sense of scale. This also leads to locations humorously being named after body parts, such as "Lickspittle Glade," "The Maneland" and "The Bitterbutte."

While you're poking around in some calcified dragon's ear canal, your own ears may recall familiar Dragon Quest songs from previous games. The late Koichi Sugiyama's past work is as well-

SWITCH PUBLISHER: SQUARE ENIX
DEVELOPER: TOSE RATING: E10+

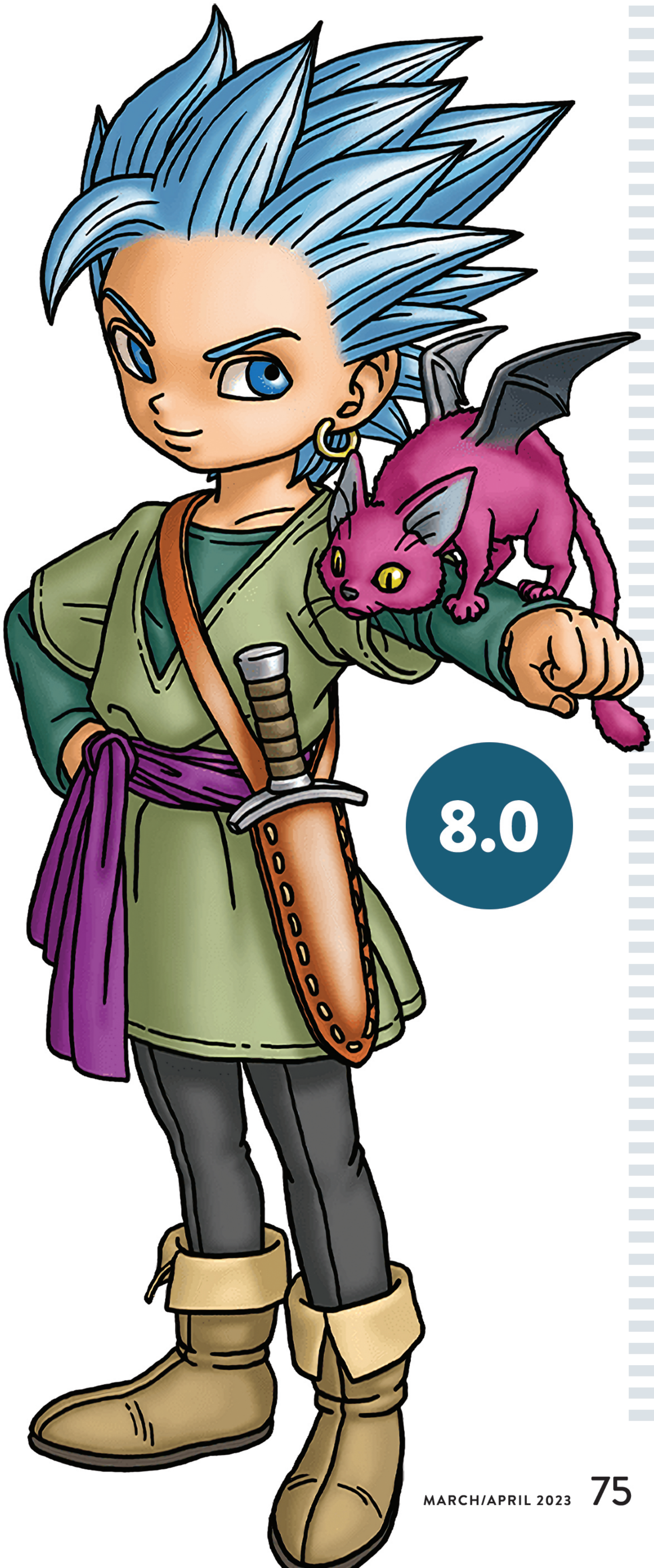
composed as always, but due to its original placement in games spanning back to the NES, some song loops are a little too brief at times. Likewise, this is unfortunately one of the DQ titles that lacks the lush orchestration that other games make full use of, and melodies such as DQVIII's gorgeous field theme take a noticeable hit. Voice acting crops up during key cutscenes, but most of the chatter is relegated to hearing your monsters toss out one of a handful of lines while exploring. And these guys talk a lot – you'll be lucky if 20 seconds go by without hearing "I'm jelly happy!" They're cute but may grate . . . except for the unlockable King Slime voiced by series director Yuji Horii! Nothing puts a smile on my face like him proudly announcing "It's me: Mr. Horii!"

Seeing as how this started off as a DQ Monsters sequel, the comparisons between the games are inevitable. And while there are still some similarities, the monster-recruiting element is pared down significantly here to make room for more open-ended adventuring. As such, there are just over 70 creatures to recruit, but only about a third of them are distinct, with the rest being palette swaps. Consequently, it's a little hard to grow attached to any one ally the way players might in the DQ Monsters series or in Pokémon. But the focus of this game is on exploring elaborate worlds and getting cool goodies to bring back to your ever-expanding base.

While at times modest, DQ Treasures packs a wealth of content into its adventure. When you're not directly hunting statues, you can engage in side activities such as crafting, cooking, doing online treasure hunts, searching out each island's hidden chests and balloons, and more. This helps keep the adventure feeling fresh, as there's rarely a shortage of things to do if you get stuck or just want a change of pace.

One mode didn't land with me though: sending your monsters out on their own off-screen expeditions to retrieve goods from other islands. Due to the mobile game-like cooldown timer, the pokey setup and the meager rewards, this feature felt too much like busywork and I ended up ignoring it after a while.

Even without that, I can easily see people spending upwards of 100 hours if they really get hooked and want to get everything. DQT is ultimately a fun and quirky adventure that, while not reaching the dizzying heights of the best of the series, is enough of a gem to warrant a recommendation to DQ fans in particular. — **MATTHEW T.**



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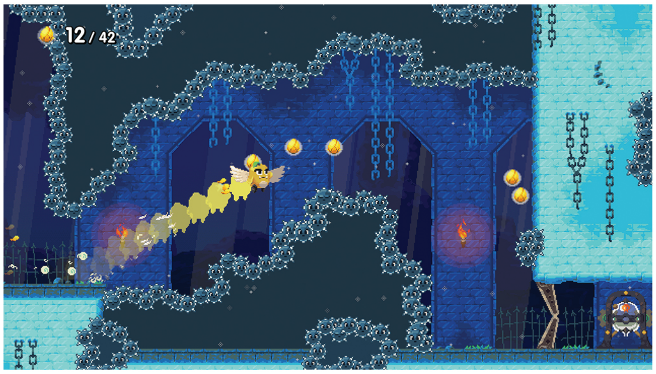

The Might of a Minion!

WUNDERLING DX

RISE UP, MINIONS!

What if the story of Super Mario Bros. had been told from a Goomba's point of view? It would've been a much quicker tale to tell, seeing as how each shuffling 'shroom in that game only appears on-screen for a few seconds before it's either left behind as the screen scrolls by, or else stomped flat under the hero's feet. But what if that most common of foes got just a little bit more fighting power, and a real chance to show its potential?

Wunderling DX aims to answer that question. In this adventure, the hero is a winsome, smiling vegetable warrior named Carrot Man . . . but you don't play as Carrot Man. Rather, you step into the role of a stepped-upon foe: a Goomba-like little Stage 1 enemy that sets off on a quest for revenge against that happy-go-lucky hero after it gets stomped in the game's opening scene. A witch grants our little anti-hero the power to jump, and then the journey begins!

. . . Unfortunately, jumping is all this little underling can do at first. It's still a common video game enemy at heart, so it constantly walks forward until it hits a wall – and then it turns around and starts walking the other way. As the player, you can't control the minion's movement – you only decide when it jumps.

That limited ability to influence the action totally changes the feel of the game. Wunderling might look like a straightforward platformer in still screenshots, but it's instead a puzzling challenge: You have to have precise timing to jump at just the right instant, while also bumping the little baddie back and forth off of safe walls to get it redirected in the way you need it to go.

And that's not the only wrinkle! The old "constant hunger" mechanic first seen in Hudson's Adventure Island games is here, as this not-so-mighty minion must touch yellow flower blooms to recharge its stamina continuously. If you take too long navigating a tricky set of jumps or stray too far off-course, blammo. Instant K.O.

It's a much more thoughtful and creative setup than I thought I'd be getting going in – and in some further good game design, things of course get more complicated as you reach later levels. The underling ends up earning the ability to wall jump, and air dash, and speed boost . . . while never learning how to ever stop its own movements entirely. It's a bit like Super Mario Run, or if you tried to play Celeste with a controller that had the right side of its D-Pad constantly stuck down.

It feels satisfying to master the many movements – but I did get quite a bit frustrated more than once in sequences that required truly precise jump timings. There are tons of secret treasure chests and hidden level exits to discover for gamers who have the patience to seek them, and I'll applaud anyone who goes for a 100% completion rate – but you can have plenty of fun just cruising through, too.

Wunderling DX was not originally on my radar as a game to review, as it first debuted on Switch three years ago – but it caught my eye recently thanks to the new physical release it's received from Premium Edition. Its horizontally oriented cardboard box gave me N64 vibes at first – but it's really more of an SNES homage on closer inspection (which is a better match for the style of the game itself). There's a bit of NES love in the mix, too, with the "cartridge sleeve" that's packed inside, and there's a slip case, sticker sheet and full soundtrack CD included as well. It all looks great, earning that "Premium" name. But if extra items like that aren't for you, I do still encourage you to take a look at the game in the eShop, where it's only $14.99! **– LUCAS**

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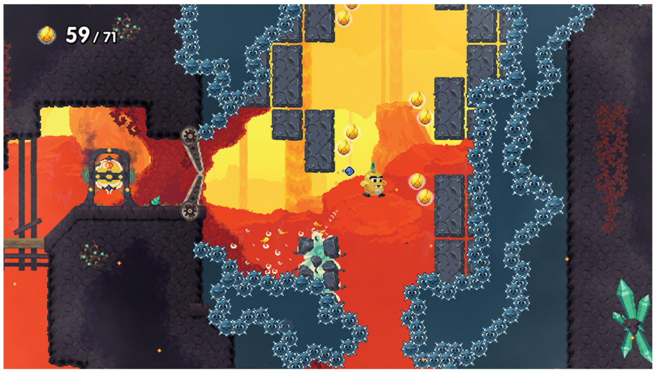
SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: BITWAVE GAMES RATING: E10+



ARCHIVE

The complete list of Nintendo Force retail reviews from the last two years. Scores reflect individual reviewers' opinions.

SWITCH

TITLE	SCORE	REVIEWER	ISSUE
Ace Angler: Fishing Spirits	6.5	Rebecca	#63
AI: The Somnium Files – nirvanA Initiative	8.0	Tony	#62
Alex Kidd in Miracle World DX	7.5	David	#54
Atelier Ryza 2: Lost Legends & the Secret Fairy	8.0	Maggie	#51
Atelier Sophie 2: The Alchemist of the Mysterious Dream	8.0	Maggie	#59
Bakugan: Champions of Vestroia	6.5	Lucas	#51
Balan Wonderworld	5.0	Lucas	#52
Bayonetta 3	9.0	Jonathan	#63
Big Brain Academy: Brain vs. Brain	8.0	Kris	#58
Blue Reflection: Second Light	8.5	Maggie	#57
Bravely Default II	9.0	Nadia	#52
Bugsnax	8.5	Lucas	#61
Capcom Fighting Collection	9.0	Jonathan	#61
Crash Bandicoot 4: It's About Time!	8.5	David	#52
Cris Tales	6.5	Maggie	#57
Cruis'n Blast	8.0	David	#56
DC Super Hero Girls: Teen Power	7.0	Kris	#53
Digimon Survive	8.0	Maggie	#63
Doki Doki Literature Club Plus!	8.5	Rebecca	#55
Dragon Ball Z: Kakarot	6.0	Kris	#56
Fire Emblem Warriors: Three Hopes	8.0	Rebecca	#61
G.I. Joe: Operation Blackout	6.5	Lucas	#54
Harvestella	8.0	Nadia	#63
Hot Wheels Unleashed	7.5	Lucas	#56
John Wick Hex	7.5	Chris	#51
JoJo's Bizarre Adventure: All-Star Battle R	6.5	Tony	#62
Kirby and the Forgotten Land	10	Lucas	#59
LEGO Star Wars: The Skywalker Saga	9.0	Thor	#59
LIVE A LIVE	8.5	Rebecca	#61
Mario + Rabbids Sparks of Hope	9.0	Lucas	#63
Mario Golf: Super Rush	9.0	Lucas	#54
Mario Party Superstars	8.5	Lucas	#57
Mario Strikers: Battle League	7.5	Lucas	#60
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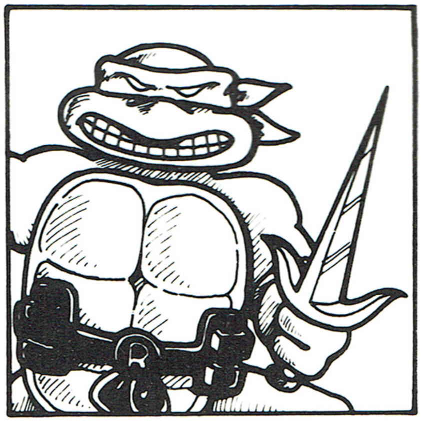
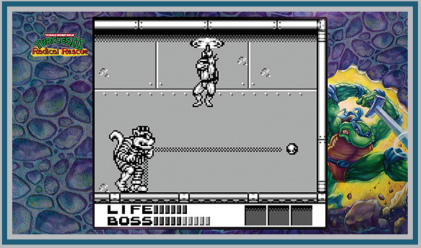
Miitopia	7.5	Brett	#53
MLB The Show 22	8.5	Dan	#59
Monster Hunter Rise	9.0	Lucas	#52
Monster Hunter Stories 2: Wings of Ruin	9.0	Maggie	#54
NEO: The World Ends with You	8.0	Rebecca	#55
NERF Legends	4.0	Lucas	#57
New Pokémon Snap	9.0	Lucas	#53
Ni no Kuni II: Revenant Kingdom – Prince's Edition	8.5	Brett	#56
Nickelodeon All-Star Brawl	7.5	Brett	#56
Nickelodeon Kart Racers 3: Slime Speedway	8.0	David	#63
No More Heroes III	9.5	Jonathan	#55
Pac-Man Museum+	8.5	Kris	#60
Pac-Man World Re-Pac	7.5	Lucas	#62
Paw Patrol Mighty Pups: Save Adventure Bay!	8.5	Lucas	#51
Persona 5 Strikers	9.0	Maggie	#52
Pokémon Brilliant Diamond	6.5	Rebecca	#57
Pokémon Legends: Arceus	9.0	Lucas	#58
Pokémon Scarlet	8.5	Lucas	#63
Pokémon Shining Pearl	6.0	Lucas	#57
Pokémon Violet	8.5	Lucas	#63
R-Type Final 2	7.5	Jonathan	#53
Record of Lodoss War: Deedlit in Wonder Labyrinth	8.0	Jonathan	#60
Rune Factory 5	7.5	Maggie	#59
Shadowverse: Champion's Battle	8.0	Maggie	#55
Shin Megami Tensei V	8.0	Meghan	#57
Sonic Colors: Ultimate	5.0	Kris	#58
Splatoon 3	9.0	Lucas	#62
Story of Seasons: Pioneers of Olive Town	6.5	Rebecca	#53
Super Mario 3D World + Bowser's Fury	10	Lucas	#51
Super Monkey Ball: Banana Mania	8.5	David	#56
Taiko no Tatsujin: Rhythm Festival	8.0	J.-Charles	#63
Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: Shredder's Revenge	10	Lucas	#60
Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: The Cowabunga Collection	9.0	David	#62
The Caligula Effect 2	8.0	Maggie	#58
The Great Ace Attorney Chronicles	9.0	Rebecca	#54
The Legend of Heroes: Trails from Zero	9.0	Maggie	#62
The Legend of Heroes: Trails of Cold Steel IV	9.0	Maggie	#52
The Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword HD	9.0	Lucas	#54
Transformers: Battlegrounds	7.5	Lucas	#54
Triangle Strategy	9.0	Nadia	#59
WarioWare: Get It Together!	7.5	Rebecca	#56
World's End Club	6.5	Kris	#55
Xenoblade Chronicles 3	10	Maggie	#62
Ys IX: Monstrum Nox	9.0	Lucas	#55





SECOND OPINION

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES: THE COWABUNGA COLLECTION

HOPEFULLY YOU'VE ALREADY played Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: Shredder's Revenge by now, as we did all we could to convince you of its excellence in previous issues! So assuming you did, I'll now also advice you to follow up on that experience with a second helping of TMNT greatness.

The Cowabunga Collection proved to be a perfect second Turtles game experience here in the Thomas home – especially since it's packed with several different Turtles game experiences!

Having just come away from Shredder's Revenge, the boys and I sat down with the similarly styled arcade beat-'em-up games first. Running through the original Arcade Game and the arcade version of Turtles in Time was hilarious alongside an 11-year-old, 8-year-old and 4-year-old. Since there's a button dedicated to "dropping in a quarter," no one could ever really lose, and that's the perfect kind of co-op play time for a parent and their kids – low-stakes fun and mindless button mashing. (Though do prepare your ears for the assaulting audio of the Turtles shouting "Cowabunga!" over and over again as each new "quarter" is dropped into the "machine.")

We also had a lot of laughs playing the various versions of TMNT Tournament Fighters, where Calvin discovered he had the skills to stomp his old man into the ground with ease. Was I letting him win? Not every time, honestly! But this again was a great way for father and son to play together, as it's smiles all around whether you've got the ability to easily win against your elementary-aged opponent or not.

For solo gaming time, I've also personally enjoyed finally getting to play TMNT III: Radical Rescue from the Game Boy. I've been curious about it for decades, ever since first seeing it covered in Nintendo Power way back when – it's great to finally get to give it a go. It's an early Metroidvania game! And a tough one – so Digital Eclipse's inclusion of a Rewind function was appreciated.

All in all, I've been greatly impressed! **– LUCAS**

9.0 DAVID

9.5 LUCAS

GAME MODDING

Mario Kart Remastered

Mario Kart 64 HD looks incredible!

AFTER SMOOTHING OUT some early bumps in their N64 emulator, Nintendo's managed to make the classic 64-bit games that are available through the Switch Online service look the way they should. Better, even! Higher framerates, greater resolution, textures that no longer seem so muddy . . . most of the games look snazzier than ever before.

But could they look *even snazzier?*

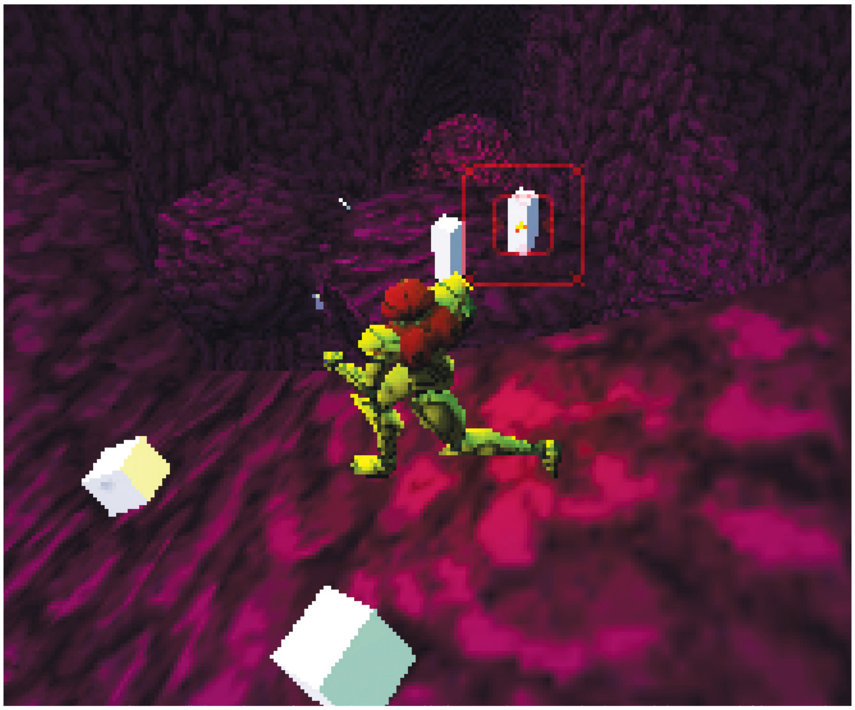
One game modder has endeavored to introduce an extreme level of snazz to Mario Kart 64 in particular. Because it was uniquely made with 2D sprites representing its karting characters rather than full 3D models, those sprites can be swapped out for substitutes rendered at much higher resolution than the originals. AndratVA realized that, then set about the massive undertaking of upgrading every racer in the roster with a fresh new look.

The work involved creating brand-new 3D models of each character in the same style as the original promotional material for Mario Kart 64 — then painstakingly posing them at every slightly different angle needed to cover every possibility of how the camera might view them while in a race. Did you know it took thousands of separate sprites to bring MK64's characters to life? Maybe Nintendo didn't save time skipping polygonal racers after all.

With the upgraded racers in place, as well as improved textures for every track surface and HD overhauls of the items as well, Mario Kart 64 HD looks honestly impressive overall. It evens expands the view to widescreen, so you can appreciate more of the redrawn art at once!

Nintendo may never make this kind of remaster officially, but thanks to AndratVA and all of this mod's contributing artists, we can at least enjoy this fresh version of Mario Kart 64 through emulation on a computer. Try it for yourself! **— LUCAS**

github.com/AndratVA/Mario-Kart-64-HD



FAN GAME IN THE WORKS

Metroid's Long-Lost 64-Bit Sequel

Metroid 64 never officially existed, but one talented fan is trying to make it a reality now!

IT WAS ME. I confess!

The Internet was on the rise at the same time as the Nintendo 64, and there were still plenty of .com names left unclaimed. In what I thought was a brilliantly prescient maneuver, I registered the name "Metroid64.com" and uploaded a simple page there with an image of Samus' helmet. I figured Nintendo would make the game eventually, and then would have to fork over the big bucks to buy the official website name back from me, the rightful legal owner! Instead I got a stern letter from Nintendo's lawyers — and they never made the game anyway.

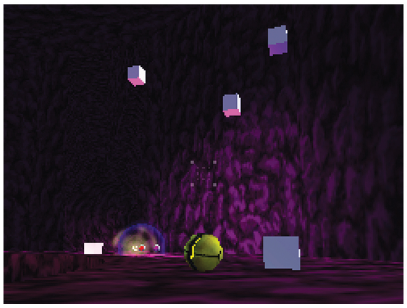
While my cybersquatting never amounted to much (I was a teenager! Give me a break!), we at least may finally be getting a 64-bit Metroid sequel. Enterprising fan game developer Luto Akino is hard at work on a brand-new version of Metroid 64, and has been posting progress updates to his Twitter account since last year.

A real Metroid 64 was considered by Nintendo back in the '90s, but one reason it apparently never materalized was that the developers of the day couldn't figure out how to make Samus move in 3D space. Retro Studios' first-person solution was an inspired one, but that didn't happen until the following hardware generation. So Luto's vision of a kind of third-person run-and-gun could be seen as a unique missing link between the Super and Prime eras.

Samus remains fully on-screen at all times to facilitate running and jumping, and targeting foes to fire her Power Beam appears to be handled elegantly as well — Luto's shared a few clips of Samus engaging in target practice with placeholder cubes standing in for enemy positions. He's also captured a great overall look for how Samus could've been portrayed in a late '90s low-poly style!

Work on this project is still early on, but already this Metroid 64 is full of promise. He plans on continuing development until a full game is completed, so wish him well and follow his updates on Twitter!

Meanwhile, I just re-registered Metroid64.com. For sentimental reasons! Maybe I'll score another cool "cease & desist" from Big N legal! **— LUCAS**



@LutoAkino

CUSTOM-MADE INSTRUCTION MANUALS

Manually Manufactured

Empty Switch cases getting you down? Nosey Tengu has the solution!

PRINTED MANUALS WERE once an essential part of the video game experience – not only did they show you how to play, but they were also full of artwork and lore that really helped bring their games to life. While you can't beat the modern convenience of phones or tablets, there's still something special about a printed booklet inside a game case. That's where Nosey Tengu comes in! He's produced fan-made manuals for games like ARMS, Super Mario 3D World + Bowser's Fury and Fire Emblem: Three Houses (one for each house!). His latest project is a collaboration with JobJob, the team behind The Legend's Cookbook (which we reviewed in Issue #49). It's READ A LIVE, a manual/cookbook combo for Square Enix's LIVE A LIVE!

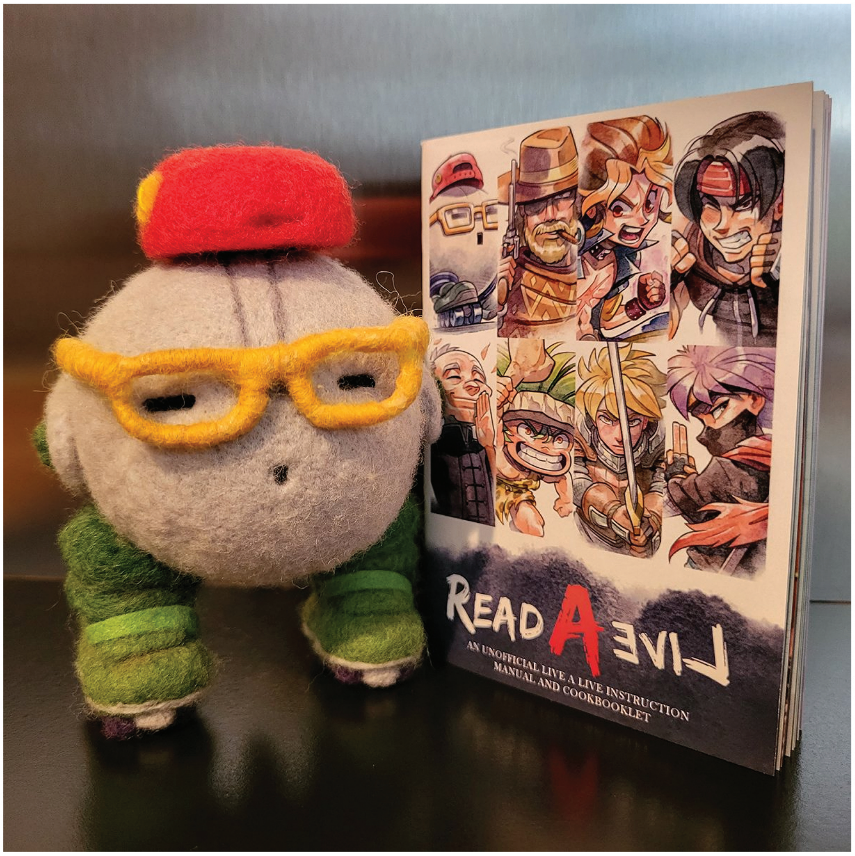
Tengu's inspiration for his manuals comes from various memorable titles with their own unique art and writing styles. "The booklet that came with Wario Land 4 amused me when I was a kid, and the handmade clay figures in Pikmin 2's booklet blew my mind," he said. All of his manuals can be seen on his Ko-fi page, and both READ A LIVE and his WarioWare: Get it Together! manual (which includes garlic-scented stickers) are being sold through JobJob's website. After making the WarioWare booklet, JobJob reached out to Tengu again and they decided to combine the two things they enjoy making the most – cookbooks and instruction booklets. LIVE A LIVE was chosen as the basis for this project because Tengu's a fan of SNES-era RPGs and was looking forward to playing the remake.

While the book's overall design is based on the UI of the 2022 remake, Tengu also had the original version in mind. "I thought it would be fitting to follow the original game's art direction, so I commissioned multiple artists in an effort to create a booklet with a variety of unique illustrations," Tengu said. That includes the adorable felted Cube seen here, made by fiber artist Mathilda Cheng. "I start by coming up with ideas for art and layouts that I can suggest to the artists and designers I collaborate with," Tengu said. "Sometimes, this entails scribbling on index cards to give my ideas a basic form, or taking screenshots using the Switch's Capture Button to use as reference material."

The recipes in READ A LIVE are based on or inspired by food seen in the eight chapters of the game, from the banana crepes in Akira's chapter to barbecue ribs based on the prehistoric era (Tengu's favorite of the eight chapters). While he handled the recipe choices, the production team handled all aspects of creating, testing and photographing the finished recipes. "Sometimes, it is hard to condense things!" said a member of JobJob's production team. "It all turned out great and we are happy that it (just barely) still fits inside the game case."

While Tengu produces his manuals with caution (especially since similar projects have been shut down in the past), he did mail Nintendo of America a copy of his ARMS manual and received a positive response.

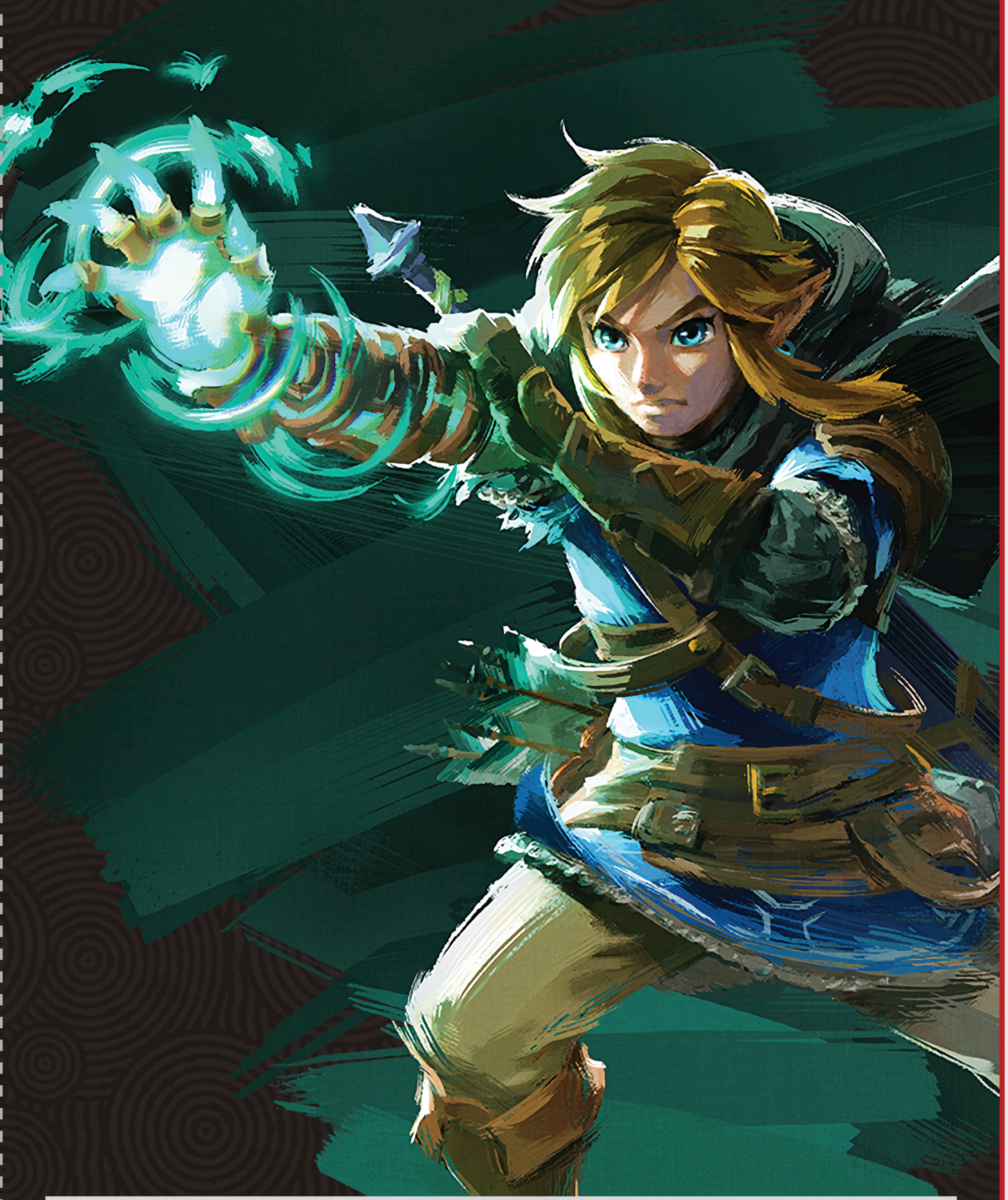
As for what's next, he jokes that he's waiting for Nintendo to announce ARMS 2 and commission him to make a manual for it. He's also thinking about making a manual "full of details about Salmonids, because who wouldn't like to learn more about fish?" **– REBECCA**



Ko-fi.com/NoseyTengu

BY JONATHAN HOLMES

NEXT ISSUE



At long last, the next Zelda adventure is finally upon us! You won't want to miss the 65th issue of Nintendo Force, because **The Legend of Zelda: Tears of the Kingdom** will be stepping fully into the spotlight as we prepare to dive back into the go-anywhere world of Hyrule. How will the landscape be changed from **Breath of the Wild**? How will it stay the same? Just what in the world is going on with Link's right arm, anyway?! We'll tackle all these questions and more, in NF #65!

IN THE WORKS FOR ISSUE #65:

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: TEARS OF THE KINGDOM

THE SUPER MARIO BROS. MOVIE REVIEWED!

KIRBY'S RETURN TO DREAM LAND DELUXE

FIRE EMBLEM ENGAGE EXPANSION PASS

OCTOPATH TRAVELER II

XENOBLADE CHRONICLES 3 EXPANSION PASS

BAYONETTA ORIGINS: CEREZA AND THE LOST DEMON

PIKMIN 4

METROID PRIME 4

ADVANCE WARS 1+2: RE-BOOT CAMP

SEA OF STARS

AND MUCH **MORE!**

MAY/ JUNE 2023

THE TIME IS NOW

THE NINTENDO 64 is having a moment — but it may be its last.

We've dedicated this NF edition to waxing nostalgic about Nintendo's 64-bit console generation, while also acknowledging that it was an era when the company lost a lot of steam. The PlayStation was allowed to be introduced as a competitor (when it could have been Nintendo's own product), and Sony's gone on to thrive in the industry for decades since. Third-party developers fled from the platform. It didn't even get its own Metroid game, for goodness' sake!

With those (and many more) reasons to sweep the memory of the Nintendo 64 into the dustbin of history, I was pleasantly surprised to see the Big N make a big deal about it again while rolling out the N64 app for Nintendo Switch Online. And even going as far as to manufacture new controllers in the old three-pronged style! It's been great to revisit hits like GoldenEye again, and discover hidden gems like WinBack.

But . . . don't get used to this. This likely-to-be-short-lived season of celebration has all the markings of a last hurrah — I can't really foresee Nintendo ever cycling back around to praising the N64 again in the future, or presenting any more of its library's games than the couple dozen we'll get access to via NSO. So play them now! Experience the N64 era for the first time while you have the chance, or relive it if you're old enough to have been there the first time around. Because the N64 might not come around again! **— LUCAS**

Credit to Mark Kurko for several high-res N64 promo images used for this issue! See more of his work at **@Markus_Kurko** on Twitter!

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